THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND AUTHORITY

DIVINE REVELATION AND HUMAN INTERPRETATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations

CP	Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Vol. I-VIII (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965-1967).
KD	Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*. Bnd. I-IV (Zürich: TVZ, 1986-1993 [1932-1970]).
LU	Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. Bd. I. Hua XVIII (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).
Röm I	Barth, Karl, *Der Römerbrief (erste Fassung)* 1919. GA II. Akademische Werke (1919), Hinrich Stoevesandt (ed.) (Zürich: TVZ, 1985).
Röm II	Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (zweite Fassung)* (Zürich: TVZ, ^{17}2005 [1922]).
VPh	Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène: introduction au problème de signe dans la phénomenologie de Husserl* (Paris: P.U.F, ^{3}1976).

Introduction

This essay analyses some aspects of the relationship between divine presence and authority in the work of Karl Barth and Eberhard Jüngel. It takes a semiotic and hermeneutic approach to this issue and investigates how divine presence and authority can be thought of together with the perspectival and interpretative character of all human communication.

In the first part the philosophical framework is set out within which this question is tackled. Human processes of signification are examined with respect to their *synchronic* and *diachronic* dimension. The synchronic approach to sign-production focuses on *decision-making* and examines how the concatenation of signs can be terminated at a particular point in time, thus enabling the interpreter to act. If no further signs are required to explain 'what something is', i.e. if the meaning of the 'last' sign becomes evident, the interpreter can carry out an action. The diachronic approach however analyses how the successive links in a chain of signs can represent a particular object ever more accurately – without resorting to a naïve realism. Both aspects of sign-production presuppose the perspectival character of all human interpretations of the world. This idea is connected with the the notion of different 'worlds of interpretation' (G. Abel).

The second and the third part of this essay relate the above insights to Christian theology. On the one hand, a consistently Trinitarian theology needs to emphasise that divine presence is always mediated *by* the contingent, i.e. by creaturely signs and human communication. On the other hand, divine presence is that which enables human beings to make non-arbitrary decisions *within* the contingent, which correspond to God's will and salvific intention for the world. In both Barth and Jüngel, it is the concept of *divine speech*, mediated by human speech, which is supposed to hold these two aspects together.

Due to insights provided by the Continental and Analytical tradition alike, the philosophical understanding of speech and intentionality underwent major changes in the twentieth century.[1] The conception of meaning as an intentional content that can be self-identically conveyed from the speaker to the hearer, is no longer plausible. Since any theory of meaning and communication must take into account the *context* and the *interpretative practice* within which an utterance occurs, it is now primarily concepts such as *language-game*, *life-world*, *tradition*, *narrative* and *culture*, which are considered the intellectually most fruitful thought-categories.

Two different conclusions can be drawn from this, which are mutually not exclusive. So far as Barth is concerned, it is evident that his preference for divine speech is motivated by the aforementioned ideal of immediacy (which, according to Derrida, the philosophical tradition associated with oral communication). Yet this immediacy proved an illusion. Oral communication may well have specific features that other types of communication lack, but it is nonetheless subject to the contingency which is characteristic of all human discourse. Phonic signifiers are not ideal but are produced and received

[1] See H. Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*.

under spatio-temporal conditions – like any other kind of signifiers. Thus on the one hand one can argue that, because of this insight, contemporary Protestantism may wish to reconsider its strong emphasis on oral proclamation. And to a certain extent, this is what happened in the last decades: divine speech has ceased to be the exclusive focus in contemporary Protestant theology and philosophy of religion.[2] On the other hand, one can hold that Protestantism's preference for oral communication has quite other roots and is not intrinsically connected with what Derrida calls a 'metaphysics of presence'. It then needs to be shown what *genuinely* unique function orality fulfils with respect to the idea of divine presence.

A great deal of recent communication theory is informed by aesthetics and rhetoric: "according to this view the creative function is a universal quality of language and poetic language is regarded as the most typical manifestation of language as such".[3] Thus the stress is no longer on ideality and the conveyance of self-identically conceived meanings, but on the creative and active character of both the encoding and the decoding of the message. Protestant theology followed suit and the writings of the proponents of Hermeneutical Theology are to some degree already informed by this new paradigm. This also applies to the work of Eberhard Jüngel, aspects of which will be discussed in part III of this essay.[4]

Yet the above remarks only scratch the surface of a much deeper question. If the paradigm of active reception is taken seriously, i.e. if speech is interpreted in an 'aesthetic' or 'poetic' sense, how far does that undermine the very heart of Barth's and Jüngel's thought? How far does that undermine the very heart of *Reformation* thought? For is not the ideal of passive reception closely connected with the formulas *solus christus*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*?[5] Is it possible to isolate divine speech from the overall structure of Protestant theology and to confine the shift from active to passive reception to the theological discipline of homiletics, without calling into question this structure altogether? These are questions which cannot be dismissed out of hand.

In fact, there can be no doubt that the idea of active reception *is* interrelated with a number of other important theological issues. First of all, active reception of the divine Word is impossible if it is believed that there is *total discontinuity* between old and new creation, between (fallen) creation and grace. But both Barth and Jüngel fully espouse this view. Put differently, for active reception to be possible, it is a prerequisite that nature is already graced so that one can at best distinguish between different *modes* of grace. Otherwise there would be no theological basis for an active human response. Such an approach by no means leads to a liberal *Kulturprotestantismus*, as Barth feared, which only insufficiently calls into question the prevailing ideology of a culture. Quite the reverse: provided it is coupled with the idea of an infinite perfectibility of the response (and the respondent), it also has an infinite *critical potential*. But this critical

[2] Cf. I.U. Dalferth, *Die Wirklichkeit des Möglichen*, 506-515; M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*; P. Stoellger, *Metapher und Lebenswelt*.
[3] Y. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 17.
[4] See also the discussion in U. Körtner, *Theologie des Wortes Gottes*.
[5] See M. Beintker, *Was ist das Reformatorische*?

potential can only be actualised in the course of time, i.e. in that the response is constantly improved.

It is Barth's theory of total discontinuity, as set out for instance in *KD* II/1 § 27, which leaves everything as it is. Whereas the *Kulturprotestantismus* developed by his predecessors more or less identifies nature and grace in the sense of a *univocity*, Barth's revelatory positivism stresses the complete discontinuity between nature and grace and is hence based on *equivocity*. Christologically speaking, the former approach is a kind of *Arianism*, the latter falls into the category of *Monophysitism*. Both variants fail to do justice to the doctrine of the two natures of Christ as set out by the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which allows for a 'third' between identity and difference. For this reason deification is at the same time humanisation, i.e. by participating in God, man does not lose but *realises* his human nature, and God, by unifying himself with creation does not lose but *preserves* his divine transcendence.

It is this theological framework within which divine and human action can be conceived together in a non-competitive way; and it is this framework which is the precondition for active reception on the part of the human addressee. Barth lacks a 'middle-voiced' approach and his theology consists of "dualities without mediation" such as that between nature and grace, reason and revelation and finite and infinite.[6] How deep-seated this ideal of passive reception is in Reformation thought can be exemplified by Ebeling's attempt to apply the category of pure receptivity to the event of the Reformation itself. In his view, Luther's greatness consists in the fact that at the decisive point, he did *not* do anything, but in his indefatigable readiness to listen to the Gospel, *let the important thing happen to himself*.[7]

It is therefore appropriate to say that the privileging of oral communication by Barth and many of his predecessors serves the purpose of thinking God as the sole agent in the divine-human encounter. But what if one follows the 'aesthetic' approach to orality mentioned above, which does allow for active reception? Have not many contemporary Protestant theologians distanced themselves from Barth and chosen this apparently more promising alternative? Are there any serious theological obstacles to such a shift of emphasis?

In order to answer this question, it is helpful to distinguish between different types of speech, which fulfil different hermeneutical functions.

a) In a situation of *mission*, as it is characteristic for instance in the New Testament writings, oral proclamation aims at providing basic 'knowledge' about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without such basic knowledge, no one can call himself a Christian, even if this knowledge alone is not yet faith. However, it is not necessary that faith is evoked at the very moment the Gospel message is heard – though such a

[6] C. Pickstock, *Duns Scotus*, 554. According to Pickstock, the historical roots of these problems can be traced back to the late Middle Ages: "The position of the analogical, as a third medium between identity and difference, whereby something can be like something else in its very unlikeness according to an ineffable co-belonging, is rejected by Scotus because it does not seem to be rationally thinkable", ibid., 547). And one could add that in contemporary philosophy and semiotics, it is (again) possible to think that 'something is like something else in its very unlikeness'. There is a 'third' between identity and difference (*tertium datur*).

[7] G. Ebeling, *Luther*, 58-78.

coincidence *may* occur (Acts 10:44). Thus the reason why oral proclamation plays such an important role in the New Testament is largely due to the fact that it was simply the only means to spread the Gospel in antiquity. Nonetheless, it has been pointed out for instance that in oral communication the sender and the addressee are co-present in the sense that the addressee *cannot not* react to the sender's address. This is not the case to the same degree if the addressee faces a written text, which is detached from its author.[8] But, one wonders, if this particular feature of the pragmatic dimension of speech is underlined, why not pay attention to other aspects too? To put it semiotically, every speaker *cannot not* communicate a great deal more than just the meaning of the words he utters, for his whole 'way of life', as it were, his facial expression, gestures, clothes, as well as the context which he chooses for his speech, signify too. These aspects may either support the content of his words or contradict it. Perhaps this does not equally apply to all types of oral communication, but it is certainly relevant to missionary work.

For the itinerant preachers in the New Testament, proclaiming the kingdom of God which is at hand, *their whole existence* as wandering charismatics is an essential part of their message:[9] they are sent out "two by two" (Lk 10:1; Mk 6:7) and receive "power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases" (Lk 9:1; cf. Mt 10:1; Mk 6:7), but "like lambs into the midst of wolves" (Lk 10:3); they are told neither to take gold nor silver, nor copper in their belts; no bag for their journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staff (Mt 10:9f; cf. Mk 6:8f; Lk 9:3, cf. also 2 Cor 11:27f). Jesus primarily called into being a movement of itinerants rather than local communities. This was by no means merely a marginal phenomenon, but decisively shaped the first generations of Christians. Being directly influenced by Jesus' own life and that of his disciples, the characteristic features of their missionary activity were *homelessness* (cf. Mk 1:16; 10:28ff), *lack of family* (cf. Mk 1:20; 10:29; Mt 8:22), *lack of possession* (cf. Mt 6:19; 10:10; Mk 10:17ff; 10:25; Lk 6:24; Acts 4:36ff) and *lack of protection* (Mt 5:38f; 5:41; 10:17ff).[10] What Jesus had taught them in word and deed, and what his disciples/apostles had handed down to their contemporaries and the next generation, was not only to be retold, but essentially to be *relived*. When St Paul's personal credibility was gravely challenged by the Galatians, he embarked on a rather lengthy description of his life, paying particular attention to the event outside Damascus. This biographical report occupies almost half of the letter to the Galatians and is supposed to provide the authoritative basis for the theological instructions in the second part. Thus Paul's (re)interpretation of his whole life in the light of this event is the way in which his calling becomes part of the message he proclaims. In other words, there is no clear demarcation between apostle and Gospel: "As the gospel is the manifestation of God's acting, so is the apostle".[11]

This type of speech will not be further analysed, but it is important to mark it off from the following two types, which fulfil a very different hermeneutical function.

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[8] I.U. Dalferth, *Jenseits von Mythos und Logos*, 247-257. Dalferth elaborates on a quotation from N. Luhmann's, *Soziale Systeme*, 561f.
[9] U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 102-104.
[10] G. Theissen, *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*, ch. 2.
[11] J. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, 232.

b) Speech, or speech-acts, can terminate the chain of signs in the sense that they interpret 'something as something'. This is what I shall call the 'literal understanding' of speech. The nature of this type of communication, which will be further delineated in the course of the essay, can be characterised by the following formula: *s (= sender) interprets (or sets) x as y to a (= addressee) in the context c*. In part II, I shall try to interpret Barth's understanding of divine speech in the *Prolegomena* to the *Church Dogmatics* in terms of this 'literal understanding'. Although this might not be the only possible way of reading Barth, let alone the most plausible interpretation of his idea of divine speech, there is evidence enough in support of such a construal.

The hermeneutical function of this type of speech is *the greatest possible determination*, for it aims at determining what a particular *x* is. As regards this understanding of communication, the 'aesthetic' approach (which places the stress on *underdetermination*) does not seem to be suitable, although the question needs to be answered of how determination can be thought of without reverting to a metaphysical theory of meaning. This leads to a number of interrelated issues which will be discussed in some detail: Firstly, how far can Barth's idea of speech do justice to contemporary philosophical insights in hermeneutics and semiotics? Secondly, how is the relationship between divine and human speech to be thought of? This question becomes particularly pressing with respect to the issue of how divine and human *authority* are interrelated. For although divine speech, according to Barth, is always mediated by human speech, the divine will and the perverted will of (fallen) human beings must be strictly kept apart. Thirdly, which is the *Sitz im Leben* of the aforementioned termination of the chain of singnifiers? Although the starting point of this investigation is oral proclamation in the Church service, speech which fulfils the function of terminating the concatenation of signs in the way outlined above, is not characteristic of the Church service. Fourthly, how is the competence/authority which the sender needs to possess in order to perform reliable acts of interpretation to be thought of? On the one hand there is the question of how various different acts of interpretation can be shaped by the one Christian *Logos*: Jesus Christ. This leads to questions discussed in the third part. On the other hand the variety of different acts of interpretation needs to be categorised. This leads to the question of *differentiation*. That is to say, it is crucial to distinguish between different *fields of interpretation* and *competence*.

c) The third part is dedicated to what I call the 'non-literal' understanding of divine speech, whose purpose is to introduce into the Christian perspective on the world and to initiate the addressee into a Christian interpretative practice. Its function is not to terminate the chain of signifiers in the sense that a *particular x* is interpreted as *y*, but to help the addressee acquire a new interpretative habit, which enables him to interpret every *x* in a specifically Christian way. It thus concerns the 'as-structure' of *all acts of interpretation*.

The starting point of these considerations is Eberhard Jüngel's conception of divine speech, for which he coined the phrase 'experience with experience' (*Erfahrung mit der Erfahrung*). As indicated above, Jüngel takes an 'aesthetic' approach to speech insofar as his conception of oral communication is informed by the rhetorical tradition and insofar as he understands parables as 'narrative metaphors'. Barth's extreme actualism is

thus mitigated. This to some degree opens up the possibility of active response on the part of the addressee. Nonetheless, Jüngel too, has been criticised for developing a theory of "Redemption without Actuality".[12] Like Barth, he does not allow for a *diachronic* mode of divine presence. To be sure, the 'experience with experience' is not just *a* specifically religious experience among other *non*-religious experiences, but an 'experience' that establishes a framework within which human experiences can be interpreted. But Jüngel nonetheless compares this 'experience with experience' to the point of a joke, a highly actualistic thought-model, and scarcely reflects on how the divine address institutes a new interpretative practice. His approach thus largely remains caught in a dichotomy between divine action and human passivity. His idea of redemption thus remains *without actuality*.

In actual fact, Christian theology has no problem to think together divine presence and action *with* human action, i.e. God also acts *in* and *through* the human response. Put differently, one could say that man is still acted upon by God when he is most active – without losing his freedom. It follows from this that human action *can* assume a sacramental character and that human beings take part in the 'working out' of salvation. Yet the sacramentality of human action depends on the quality of the human response, i.e. whether it corresponds to the divine will or not. Moreover, there are degrees of appropriateness, which means that an action does not either fully represent divine presence or not at all.

These insights open up new possibilities for the 'non-literal' understanding of divine speech. Firstly, there is no longer need to resort to actualistic thought-categories. Since human beings can receive grace at the very moment they perform an action, or carry out *interpretative labour*, Umberto Eco's conception of the 'aesthetic text' appears to be a useful hermeneutical tool. Its main function is to change 'the way we see the world'. But such a change can only come about through man's active interpretative endeavour. Secondly, the 'aesthetic text' is a semiotic, not merely a linguistic model. And because a one-sided privileging of phonic signifiers is no longer plausible without the ideal of passive reception – although speech may still fulfil a unique function – there is now room for other 'channels' as well. That is to say, the Christian *Logos* can be represented by sign-vehicles made of various materials. This opens up the possibility of Christian art and a liturgical enactment of the Gospel narrative. Thirdly, as the acquisition of an interpretative habit now stands at the centre, the idea of the point of the parable, which dominates Jüngel's approach, gives way to, or is at least supplemented by concepts such as *reiteration* and *inculcation*. Even if a human being is most active, he is at the same time in a state of reception. These are the main issues addressed in part III.

It seems that Barth and a great deal of the Protestant tradition to a certain extent conflate these three types of speech. This is due to the fact that the epistemic problems which the Protestant notion of 'divine speech' is supposed to solve are paid so much attention to. However, these epistemic problems, which once dominated philosophy and (Protestant) theology alike, have long ceased to be at the centre of contemporary debates. For this reason it is now possible to more subtly distinguish between the specific hermeneutical

[12] Thus the title of an article by R. Spjuth.

functions which these different types of communication fulfil. This is not to say that they cannot partly overlap.

To sum up: communication in a situation of *mission* aims at familiarising the addressees with the content of Christian faith. Its focus is on a context-sensitive retelling of the Gospel narrative which tries to elicit faith. But it is by no means required that the occurrence of faith coincides with the performance of the speech-act. On the other hand, the form of this retelling must be shaped by its content.[13] The primary goal of the *Church service*, however, is to inculcate the addressee with the Gospel narrative in order to effect the acquisition of an interpretative habit. Although for inculcation to be effective, originality, innovation and a high degree of context-sensitivity are required too, the main aim is not the conveyance of 'new' meanings. Rather, basic knowledge of the Gospel narrative and of the content of Christian faith is presupposed. It is the in principle infinite process of an active *appropriation* of the Gospel narrative which takes centre stage. Since this is not merely an intellectual endeavour, but also comprises the education of desire, non-verbal communication and reiteration play an important role. Semiotically speaking, it is Eco's idea of the 'aesthetic text' which encompasses most of these aspects: inexhaustible depth of meaning; appropriation through interpretative labour; and communication on the basis of non-verbal messages. Finally, processes of decision-making aim at terminating the chain of signifiers. Their *Sitz im Leben* is not the Church service but the diverse situations of everyday life, independent of whether the decisions are of a personal or institutional kind. Prototypically, these terminations occur in dialogues rather than monologues.

In all three types of communication, speech may play an important role, but none of them presupposes that oral communication conveys self-identical meanings.

So far as the structure of this essay is concerned, the philosophical part *precedes* the theological analyses. Yet it is not the aim of this investigation to check whether Barth and Jüngel do justice to the philosophical theories set out in part I. Rather, these models are *used* to make a theological point and therefore lead to a dialogue with other theological thinkers and traditions (cf. part II and III).

[13] Cf. J.-L. Marion, *Dieu sans l'être*, 259-277.

Part I: The Art of Sign-Making

1 Diachrony and synchrony, realism and pluralism

Post-modern thought, in the continental and analytic tradition alike, emphasises the perspectival and interpretative character of all notions of reality. Language, we are told, not only represents or depicts an already existing, language-independent world, but is rather reality-constitutive. This is not to say that there is no extra-linguistic reality, but only makes clear that our knowledge of objects is always already mediated by language. However, the impossibility of checking from an external standpoint whether linguistic phenomena do correspond to an extra-linguistic reality renders problematic the traditional understanding of truth as *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*.

In his *Philosophy of the Sign*, Josef Simon attempts to *reinterpret* traditional philosophical concepts such as 'truth', 'reality', or 'reference' within the framework of Peirce's Pragmaticism.[1] According to Simon, a sign is that which we understand. Insofar as we understand it, we do not ask what it means.[2] If we do ask about the meaning of a sign, we understand something *as* a sign, and therefore also something *about* it, but we do not understand it *entirely*. However, if we did not understand *anything* about it, we could not ask about its meaning. Thus the minimal requirement is that we recognise a sign *as* a sign, i.e. its partly understood meaning must govern our question about its 'full' meaning. But since we cannot step outside the network of sign-making, the answer to the question about the meaning of a sign is itself a sign. It is the sign that is capable of answering our question about the meaning of the preceding sign, and therefore its *interpretation*. In other words, the difference between sign and meaning becomes only tangible in a situation of non-understanding. We then start dividing up a sign, distinguishing between what we understand about it and what not. That aspect which eludes immediate understanding enters into consciousness *as something* and is henceforth regarded as a predicate of a posited subject which grammatically precedes this predicate.[3] It follows that the *internal relation* between the sign that has not been fully understood and its meaning (i.e., the sign that replaces it) consists in that part of the (first) sign which *has* been understood. This part does not 'appear' in consciousness, precisely *because* it has been understood right from the beginning, and thus holds together the latter and the former sign.[4] In other words, the sign-relation connects the sign that is under investigation with the sign that explains the one that is under investigation. The explanation thus forms a proposition, with the former being its *theme* and the latter its *rhema*. And the completed proposition is itself a sign, for it clarifies the meaning of the old sign that was not understood fully, the theme. If the proposition suffices as an answer, no further ex-

[1] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*. Other major influences are Nietzsche, Kant, Hegel and Wittgenstein.
[2] Ibid., 39f.
[3] Ibid., 44.
[4] Ibid., 53.

planations are needed, even if under different circumstances, a new question may be raised.

A sign, which we do not understand fully, is an imperfect sign with an imperfect meaning and requires interpretation to overcome this lack of understanding. In perfect understanding, by contrast, the question about how to understand something does not arise, i.e. the sign and its interpretation are one. For instance, we read a text 'without interpretation'.[5] It is only when we do not understand something in the text that we pause and ask about the meaning of a sign, thereby trying to replace the sign at issue by another one, in order to explain it. What is needed, then, is more text or some explanatory discourse in order to overcome this lack of understanding. Yet, according to Simon, it would be nonsensical to say that 'a sign could have different meanings', depending on the interpretation of the reader. For a sign is only recognised as a sign in the act of reading. It only exists as part of semiosis and cannot be identified outside of a concrete employment.

That part of a sign which is not understood enters into consciousness as something that needs further elucidation. Consciousness is thus "the attempt at the interpretation, at the explanation, of one sign by another on. It is work on signs …" or the space of this endeavour to clarify and explicate that which remained unclear.[6] This implies that a sign which is not immediately understood, only manifests itself in the question about its meaning, that is to say, it only exists as a sign if this question arises. Consequently, thinking begins where our interpretations of perceptions remain vague and uncertain, i.e. where our sensations resist easy assimilation. Perceiving as such, however, is the kind of interpretation that is altogether certain so that no interpretative labour is required. In principle, it is nonsensical to call it 'interpretation' at all; at least so long as no other possible ways of construing it crosses the mind of the interpreter. Thinking only occurs if there are doubts about what something is, if there is an interpretation that needs to be rendered certain.[7]

If this process of interpretation is successfully carried out, the sign that could not be understood is replaced by another that is more fitting, i.e. which we understand immediately. The 'new' sign is then the meaning of the 'old' sign. It can only have one meaning, namely the one that is satisfactory at this very moment and in this particular context. If this is not the case, it must be replaced by a third one and so on, until a sign is immediately comprehensible and the chain of signifiers comes to a close. To continue asking about the meaning of a sign which was 'fully' understood is nonsensical. But it is very well possible that at a later point in time, the given explanation – i.e., the substituting sign – will become unintelligible itself, thus prolonging the process of interpretation indefinitely, until a satisfactory interpretation can be found. Although the replacing sign is the meaning of the replaced sign, it is also correct to say that the old and the new sign have the *same* meaning. After all, it is the first sign that we want to understand by means of the second one.

[5] Ibid., 39.
[6] Ibid., 41.
[7] Ibid., 79.

But how does this pragmatic approach bear on Simon's understanding of philosophical concepts such as 'reality', 'reference' and 'truth'? This question can be answered in two different ways, depending on whether the focus is on the *diachronic* or *synchronic* aspect of sign-production.[8]

A) Diachrony

The question about the meaning of a sign can come up with every sign, even with those that have, as meaning-signs, already answered the question about the meaning of a preceding sign. This leads in principle to an infinite regress. From a diachronic perspective, 'realism' is thus the belief that the transition from one sign to other signs approximates truth asymptotically, even if the latter lies in infinity "so that there cannot be any final and definitely true sign".[9] Hence truth must be understood as the *better version of signs*, and not as the transcendence of the signs to a *thing itself*.[10] The meaning of a sign is the sign that appears to be better than the preceding one at a particular time. Thus philosophy does not produce 'concepts' *ad esse* but only *ad melius esse*, i.e. there is no transcendental signified.[11] Put differently, the truth lies in the 'goodness' of the particular transition itself and therefore remains without an *external* standard. The rules we follow in moving from one sign to another regulate and restrict our choices, but only pertain to *one* particular 'language'. And the question about which of the many 'languages' is nearer to truth cannot be answered by means of a comparison between them and an extra-linguistic truth. Moreover, such transitions are at times considered 'good', even if they do not follow the prevailing rules but rather *violate* them. In other words, it turns out that a genuine approximation to truth may only be achieved by virtue of a radical change of the 'language'.[12] But although there is no external standard to assess a series of transitions, the replacement of one sign by other signs nonetheless does not only serve *individual* purposes. Rather, the 'new' signs are always considered to be *generally better* than the one that was considered in need of interpretation. There is a *social* dimension to all processes of clarification since all meaning-signs produced are directed at a particular *community* (*CP* 5.353-5.356).[13] In order to get a clearer grasp of such *directed serialisations*, which presuppose the common sense of a community, some aspects of Peirce's philosophy must be discussed in greater detail. This can be done best by marking off his understanding of *unlimited semiosis* from alternative approaches which seem to be close to Peirce at first glance. Following Eco, I shall briefly look at the Hermetic tradition and Deconstruction, and then return to Peirce's own approach.

a) Renaissance Hermetism and Deconstruction

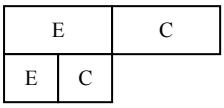
The pivot of *Renaissance Hermetism* was the principle of "universal analogy and sympathy".[14] Every item of the sublunar world stands in a relation of similitude or resem-

[8] Simon does *not* use the terms synchronic and diachronic at this point of his argument.
[9] Ibid., 237.
[10] Ibid., 236.
[11] Ibid., 143. Cf. I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 759 fn.
[12] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, 237.
[13] Ibid., 232.
[14] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 24.

blance to (m)any other element(s) in this sublunar world, as well as to (m)any other element(s) in the superior world. As a result, everything can be connected with everything and every element can become the expression or the content of any other element. Yet Hermetic semiosis does not deny the existence of a univocal, universal and transcendental meaning. Rather, the similarities that can be discovered in the universe are grounded in the Neo-platonic One that constitutes the transcendent subject and which is the site of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, holding together all the seemingly disparate entities. And although Renaissance Hermetism aims at identifying in every text, as well as in the text of the world, the *fullness* of signification, rather than its absence, it nonetheless leads to an infinite shift and deferral of all meanings. Since the meaning of every word or thing is always another word or another thing, every utterance is reduced to an ambiguous allusion to something else. Accordingly, an interpretation cannot be tested for its reliability but defies any definitive assessment, and the final content of every expression remains a mystery that will never be exhaustively resolved. Therefore Eco calls this particular understanding of unlimited semiosis Hermetic *drift* or *connotative neoplasma*.[15] For the 'rules' by means of which connections are established between words and/or things entail a wide variety of different criteria (metaphorical, metonymical, phonetic, etc.) and hence remain extremely vague and unrestrictive. Eco gives the following example in which an interpreter moves from the term 'peg' to the term 'Plato' in only six steps: "Peg – pig – bristle – brush – Mannerism – Idea – Plato".[16]

The concept 'connotation' was introduced by the semiotician Hjelmslev and proved a useful tool for the study of myth in the work of Roland Barthes. According to Barthes, every system of signification consists of *E*, expressions (or signifiers), *C*, contents (or signifieds), and the relations between *E* and *C*, *R*. *ERC* thus forms the primary sign-system. This primary sign-system can be pressed into the service of a second, more comprehensive sign-system so that Barthes speaks of "staggered" systems.[17] In the case of connotation, the primary system ($E_1R_1C_1$) turns into the *expression* of the secondary system: E_2 *(=* $E_1R_1C_1$*)* R_2C_2. The first level is that of *denotation*, the second that of *connotation* (see Figure A).[18]

Figure A



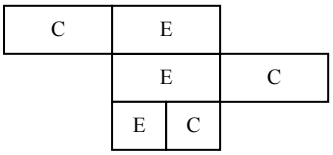
Barthes's best-known example for such 'staggered systems' stems from his *Mythologies*, in which he analyses the cover photo of the French magazine *Paris-match*. On the level of denotation, the photo (E_1), an assemblage of black and white patches or marks, shows a young black African in a French uniform, his eyes uplifted and probably fixed on the tricolour (C_1). On the level of connotation however, the denotative sign ($E_1R_1C_1$) connotes the implicit content (C_2) that "France is a great empire, that all of its sons,

[15] Ibid., 29.
[16] Ibid., 27.
[17] R. Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 89. The helpful abbreviations are borrowed from W. Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics*, 310f.
[18] Figures A-C are taken from U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 30-32.

without distinction in colour, serve faithfully under its flag and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal of this black [man] to serve his alleged oppressors".[19] The content C_2 thus forms part of a new connotative sign whose expression (E_2) is identical with the whole of the denotative sign ($E_1R_1C_1$). Yet Eco points out that even if a connotation has become culturally recorded, it is always dependent on a particular context. Thus, in a different situation, it would be more plausible to regard the black man in a French uniform as a spy who in actual fact fights for the liberation of Algeria (or any other French ex-colony).

Now as far as the *neoplastic growth* of the Hermetic tradition is concerned, no contextual constraints regulate the free associations of the interpreter so that even mere phonetic similarity at times serves to connect two utterly disparate elements (Figure B).

Figure B:



Hermetism has often been compared to the drift of *Deconstruction*, as set out in the writings of Jacques Derrida. In the second chapter of his *Grammatology*, Derrida turns to Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and tries to show that linguistics too is under the spell of the logocentric metaphysics of presence that allegedly dominates the entire history of philosophy in the West.[20] Saussure distinguishes between the signifier (*image acustique*/*signifiant*) and the signified (*concept*/*signifié*), which are both mental entities and arbitrarily associated, i.e. there is no iconicity between the signifier and the signified. This explicitly dyadic character of the sign implies that there is no referential object outside the sign-system which is part of semiosis. Rather, Saussure's semiological approach conceives of meaning in terms of the semantic value a concept has within the whole system of language (*langue*). These semantic values form a web of structural relations so that meaning is not constituted by the concepts as such but by the differences and oppositions between them.[21]

However, as Derrida points out, like Aristotle, Rousseau and Hegel, Saussure regards writing as *phonetic* writing, i.e. the written sign is subordinated to the phonic sign of spoken language. Saussure writes: "Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first".[22] Writing is considered the 'outside', the exterior representation of language. However, Derrida sees an inconsistency between Saussure's statement that writing and graphic signs are (mere) *images*, *representations*, or *figurations* of the phonic signs, and his assertion that the signifier is always arbitrarily associated with the signified.[23]

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[19] R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 223.
[20] J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie,* 42ff, esp. 65ff.
[21] F. de Saussure, *Course de linguistique générale,* 98-101, 114ff, 150ff, 158-169.
[22] Ibid., 45.
[23] Yet, according to Saussure, this arbitrariness only concerns the relationship between the signifier and the idea which it represents, but not the use of signifiers by a linguistic community. On the level of lan-

Yet, for Saussure, writing does not only constitute an external image of the internal 'real language' (orality), but corrupts and distorts the purity of speech. Writing veils the appearance of language, it is a *dis*guise rather than a guise for language. Originally, there was a 'natural bond', i.e. a kind of iconicity between the phonic signifier and the signified to which the visible image of writing was subordinated. But this relationship of subordination was inversed "by the original sin of writing".[24] The graphic signs of writing and their seeming stability and permanence came to be seen as better suited to guarantee the diachronic unity of language. Yet, according to Saussure, the superficial bond of writing could only constitute a *fictitious unity*, and led to a problematic development; for henceforth more attention was paid to the visual *image* than to the original *object* itself (i.e. the phonic signifier).

Derrida, by contrast, argues that if one takes the thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign seriously, and applies it to the spoken as well as to the written word, it is no longer tenable to subordinate the graphic to the phonic signifier. He thus to a certain extent *reverses* the hierarchy between speech and writing and points out that the notion of an arbitrary institution of the sign "is unthinkable before the possibility of writing and outside of its horizon".[25] Derrida argues that if one follows Saussure's thesis of arbitrariness, which in principle allows for a conventional relationship between the phonic and the graphic signifier, how can one still call writing an 'image' or a 'representation' of speech, something 'external' to real language? He therefore questions *in the very name of the arbitrariness of the sign* Saussure's understanding of writing as 'image' or 'natural symbol' of language. His critique is further supported by the fact that Saussure himself regards the phoneme as something utterly unimaginable so that nothing visible can stand in a relation of resemblance to it.

From Derrida's grammatological point of view, by contrast, writing is at once *more exterior* to speech than Saussure has it – for the former is not just the latter's 'image' or 'symbol', and *more interior* to speech – for speech is always already in itself writing. Put differently, the graphic signifier, like all signifiers, only refers to the phonic signifier through a web of interrelations with other signifiers that form a 'total system'. Thus the concept of writing implies the notion of the *instituted trace* (*trace instituée*) "*as the possibility common to all systems of signification*".[26] Yet both concepts, *institution* as well as *trace*, need to be detached from the philosophical tradition from which they are taken. The French word *trace*, which also carries implications of 'track', 'footprint' and 'imprint', can be understood as a synonym of other Derridian terms such as *archi-écriture* or *différance.* It reminds us that word, thing or thought, can never become one. Meaning and reference are not based on a one-to-one correlation between thought, word and object, but are constituted by the relationship of difference between the signs. The graphic as well as the phonic sign is a structure of difference, which is determined by the trace of that 'other' which is forever absent. The 'trace' thus denotes the aspect of

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guage usage, the signifiers are immutable and cannot be modified in any way by an individual – even if a language-system can of course undergo alterations in the course of time.

[24] J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 53.

[25] Ibid., 65.

[26] Ibid., 68, emphasis mine.

the *radically other* within the structure of difference, which is the sign. Accordingly, the oppositions between convention and nature, sign and symbol (in Saussure's sense) are only meaningful *after* the possibility of the trace. Derrida argues that the unmotivated character of the sign "requires a synthesis in which the wholly other announces itself as such (*comme tel*) – without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity – within what is not it".[27] In other words, this presentation of 'the other as such' entails a dissimulation of its 'as such' that has always already begun so that no structure of being escapes it, and which does away with the metaphysical understanding of being as being-present (*étant-present*). The trace must be conceived before being.

It follows that the notion of the trace transcends *both* motivation and arbitrariness. One can thus say that "the trace is indefinitely its own becoming-unmotivated" (*devenir-immotivée*).[28] Accordingly, it is impossible to distinguish between two different classes of signs, *symbols* (motivated in Saussure's usage) and *signs* (unmotivated in Saussure's usage), since there is only a *becoming-sign* (*devenir-signe*) of the *symbol*. This implies that the trace is neither more cultural nor natural, but rather that starting from which the becoming-unmotivated of the sign – and with it the above distinction between natural and cultural – is made possible.

After his critique of Saussure, Derrida turns to Peirce, in whose semiotics he claims to have discovered a similar process of becoming-unmotivated. Derrida approvingly quotes the following passage from Peirce's *Elements of logic*: "Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols" (*CP* 2.302). In order to understand Derrida's argument, we have to keep in mind that the motivated sign, *Saussure's symbol*, (more or less) corresponds to *Peirce's icon*, and that the *Peircian symbol* is the rough equivalent to what the Swiss linguist calls the *arbitrary* or *unmotivated* sign. In other words, unlike Saussure – who remains largely entangled in Western logocentrism – Peirce seems to have anticipated the logic of the trace. That is to say, he is aware that the symbolic (Saussure's arbitrary sign) is rooted in the non-symbolic (Saussure's symbol). Derrida thus states that Peirce "goes very far in the direction of a deconstruction of the transcendental signified …".[29] Similar to Derrida's own work, there is the notion of an *indefiniteness of reference* which excludes the idea of a 'thing itself' outside semiosis. Since every signified is always already a sign as well, there is no such thing as intuitive evidence of objects. The sign gives rise to an interpretant, which itself becomes a sign and so forth *ad infinitum*. Accordingly, the self-identity of the signified remains concealed and is always on the move. Derrida concludes: "Il n'y a donc que des signes dès lors qu'il y a du sens".[30]

[27] Ibid., 69.
[28] Ibid.
[29] "Peirce va très loin dans la direction de ce que nous avons appelé plus haut la dé-construction du signifié transcendental, lequel, à un moment ou à un autre, mettrait un terme rassurant au renvoi de signe à signe", J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 71.
[30] Ibid., 73.

b) Different readings of C.S. Peirce

Although Umberto Eco does not equate Hermetic drift with Deconstruction, he nonetheless sees a very close link between these two traditions.[31] But it is questionable whether the diagram which is supposed to illustrate the nature of neo-plastic growth (Figure B) does really justice to Derrida's Deconstruction. For instance, the French philosopher has been accused of being a nihilist and relativist, often in connection with his famous dictum *il n'y a pas de hors-texte.*[32] Yet, as he himself has pointed out, this statement should not be naively construed in terms of a suspension and denial of all referents. Rather, it simply means that all reality bears the structure of a differential trace so that we cannot refer to 'reality' without an interpretative experience.[33] In other words, the above dictum wants to call attention to the unavoidability and importance of the notion of context for our understanding of meaning: "One of the definitions of what is called deconstruction would be […] to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualization".[34] Derrida's formula, *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, must therefore be interpreted as "there is nothing outside *context*".[35] According to Eco, however, one characteristic of Hermetism is precisely that it is *free* of all contextual restrictions.[36]

Yet what is of interest here is primarily the relationship between Derrida and *Peirce's* understanding of unlimited semiosis – and not that between Hermetism and Deconstruction. And it has been pointed out by various commentators that there are significant differences between these two thinkers.[37] The most important difference between Peirce and Derrida is without doubt the *teleological* character of Peircian *Pragmaticism*[38], which is strikingly absent in Deconstruction. Peirce writes: "[A] sign is something by knowing which we know something more" (*CP* 8.332). That is to say, the sign becomes extensionally as well as intentionally more and more determined in the sequence of interpretations and asymptotically approaches its ultimate or logical interpretant (as Peirce also calls it). But before I elaborate on this, let me introduce the basic terminology of his approach. According to Peirce, semiosis can be defined as follows:

> A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representation (*CP* 2.228).

The term *representamen* denotes the perceptible object of the sign and corresponds to what Morris calls 'sign-vehicle' or Hjelmslev 'expression' (*CP* 2.228, 2.230). It is a

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[31] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 32.
[32] Cf. C. Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, 155-165.
[33] J. Derrida, *Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion*, 148.
[34] Ibid., 136.
[35] Ibid., italics mine.
[36] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 30.
[37] I am following ibid, 34ff and K. Oehler, *Über die Grenzen der Interpretation aus der Sicht des semiotischen Pragmatismus*. The relationship between Peirce and Derrida is also discussed in S.B. Rosenthal, *Sign, time and the viability of trace: Derrida and Peirce*; S. Maras, *A Semiotics of the Proxy*.
[38] In an essay called *What Pragmatism Is* (*CP* 5.411-437), published in 1905, Peirce called his own philosophical project *Pragmaticism* in order to mark it off from William James's *Pragmatism*.

vehicle that conveys to the mind of the interpreter something from outside (*CP* 1.339). Signs may be analysed as they are in "their own material nature", as regards "their relations to their objects", or with respect to their "relations to their interpretants" (*CP* 8.333). And the term representamen denotes the sign only with regard to the first aspect, i.e. "[a]s it is in itself" (*CP* 8.334). Consequently, it is only the *first* correlate of the sign and cannot be equated with the sign as such, which has a triadic character. Yet as far as terminology is concerned, Peirce is not altogether consistent and at times uses the term sign instead of representamen.[39]

Protology

Furthermore, Peirce distinguishes between the *immediate* and the *mediate* or *dynamical* object. "… [W]e have to distinguish the Immediate Object, which is the Object as the Sign itself represents it, and whose Being is thus dependent upon the Representation of it in the Sign, from the Dynamical Object, which is the Reality which by some means contrives to determine the Sign to its Representation" (*CP* 4.536). In other words, it is the dynamical object that determines the interpreter's production of interpretants, although it is never immediately present but only known through the immediate object. Put differently, the latter is a mental representation of an object.

According to Eco, the dynamical object *cannot* be an physical entity in the world, but is rather a mental element such as a thought, an emotion or a belief, etc. He even goes so far as to say that the dynamic object can be a merely fictive idea in the human mind.[40] Accordingly, Eco does not identify, for instance, a text produced by an author with the dynamical object. Rather, it is the intention of the author who produced the text or that which *motivated* him to write it in this rather than another way, which constitutes the dynamical object; although he does not deny that a text can also be interpreted independent of its author's intent.[41]

For Oehler, by contrast, the dynamical object *can* but *need not* be a physical entity. Accordingly, it is possible to identify the (external object of the) text with the dynamical object insofar as it initiates a process of interpretation and renders the person in front of the text an interpreter.[42] And the interpretation which results from this process, produces or rather *is* the immediate object that correlates with the dynamical object. Oehler emphasises that the object of the text already exists before the process of interpretation unfolds, i.e. the resulting interpretations must be regarded as something that stands *in relation* to the object that is being interpreted. Yet in the course of semiosis, there is a kind of metamorphosis taking place, in which the dynamical object is transformed into the immediate object – i.e. for the interpreter. The dynamical object diminishes and gives way to the unfolding interpretation. It is thus only present *in the mode of absence*. That which has been initiated, leaves behind the initiating object; but never fully, since without the latter, the former would never have come into existence.[43]

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[39] W. Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics*, 42.
[40] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 39.
[41] Ibid., 38f.
[42] K. Oehler, *Über Grenzen der Interpretation aus der Sicht des semiotischen Pragmatismus*, 61f.
[43] Ibid., 62.

Once again, according to Oehler, it is possible to identify the text as an external object (*der Text als äußerer Gegenstand*) with the dynamical object, insofar as the former initiates a process of interpretation. He thus calls the dynamical object "a source of effects".[44] By contrast, Eco holds that even *before* the process of interpretation commences, the dynamical object was *not* an object: "For Peirce, when the sign is produced the Dynamic Object is no more *there* (and before the sign was produced it was not an object at all)".[45] The reason why Eco and Oehler interpret Peirce in different ways is due to the fact that they pursue disparate philosophical projects. Eco thinks of meaning in terms of *cultural units* and separates it radically from questions of reference and extension. According to him, the latter only becomes relevant with respect to a *theory of mentions* or when we are concerned with the truth-value of a statement.[46] Oehler, by contrast, tends to a 'metaphysical' reading of Peirce, since he wants to uphold the unity of our world(s) of interpretation and action. I shall come back to this issue in a moment.

So far I have only discussed Peirce's use of the term representamen and the difference between the immediate and the dynamical object. But how are these concepts related to those aspects of semiosis which Peirce calls *ground*, *meaning* and *interpretant* (cf. *CP* 2.228)? In principle it is possible to equate ground, meaning and interpretant, since these three terms basically denote one and the same thing with respect to different points of view.[47] Considering the proposition 'this stove is black', we can say that the quality or general attribute 'black' is attributed to a particular stove. Following the Scotist tradition, Peirce regards 'black(ness)' as an individual or a monad insofar as it is predicated of something, but as a universal or abstraction insofar as it is perceived by the intellect. For a quality is a general idea or an "imputed character" (*CP* 1.559). As a "general attribute" (*CP* 1.551) it is the quality that has been selected among many other possible general attributes in order to regard the object (here the stove) in some respect. Thus one can say that the ground is an attribute of the object insofar as it has been chosen in a particular way so that only *some* of its (possible) attributes are made pertinent. This selection does in turn constitute the *immediate object* of the sign and is represented by the interpretant. For this reason, the ground should not be equated with the total meaning of the object but is rather a *meaning component*. But both ground and meaning must be regarded as 'ideas' in the sense that signs always stand for their objects in *some* respect, rather than in all respects. Accordingly, the term 'idea' is not to be taken in the manner of Plato but rather in a pragmatic way, e.g. when we say that somebody catches somebody else's idea (cf. *CP* 2.228). Thus the ground is that of an object which can be understood and conveyed under a certain aspect and therefore corresponds to the content of an expression. Hence it can be identified with meaning, or a meaning component. Similarly, there is no profound difference between the meaning of a sign – which is in principle the sum total of all possible grounds – and the interpretant, for the interpretant is nothing other than the idea to which a sign gives rise in the mind of the interpreter. In other words, meanings become only tangible by means of interpretants which

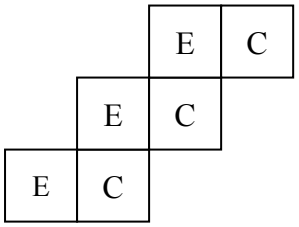
[44] K. Oehler, *Sachen und Zeichen*, 73.
[45] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 39.
[46] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 58-68.
[47] U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 184.

represent them in some respect. "The interpretant is a way to represent, by means of another sign […] what the representamen in fact *selects* of a given object (its ground)".[48]

Eschatology

Peirce's *protology* is supplemented by his *eschatology*: "The object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant. But an endless series of representations, each representing the one behind it, may be conceived to have an absolute object as its limit" (*CP* 1.339). That is to say, there is apart from the immediate object that only occurs *within* semiosis, a final interpretant which brings the interpretative process to an end. This ideal limit, which lies in infinity, manifests itself in everyday life as an interpretative *habit* and can be viewed as an anticipation of this end. Peirce defines it as "a tendency […] to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances in the future" (*CP* 5.487). Eco clearly *identifies* the habit with the final interpretant.[49] The habit consists of patterns of interpretation and action that bring consistency and order into our lives. It thus enables us – as I shall further analyse below – to temporarily interrupt the chain of interpretations and to carry out certain actions. Eco suggest illustrating this 'directed serialisation' as follows (Figure C):

Figure C:



In the absence of a transcendental signified, the habit, which as we have seen, constitutes a disposition to act upon the world, requires something that legitimises it and at the same time serves as a corrective. This function is fulfilled by the *community*, which can be regarded as an "intersubjective guarantee of a nonintuitive, nonnaively realistic, but rather conjectural, notion of truth".[50] Only thus can be explained how an infinite series of representations can gradually approximate the truth without resorting to the idea of an immediate access to an extra-linguistic reality (cf. *CP* 1.339). Hence an interpretation comes to a temporary end when certain members of an interpretative community, who are considered to be competent in this respect, reach a consensus about a particular issue – although every single interpretation remains subject to the principle of fallibility. If a statement about something is considered to be true by an interpretative community, then this statement refers precisely to that which stood at the beginning of the chain of interpretants and initiated the process of interpretation.

Yet there are again significant differences between Umberto Eco's and Josef Simon's interpretation of Peirce on the one hand, and Oehler's construal of Peircian Pragmaticism on the other. All of them agree that Peirce's triadic understanding of the sign tran-

[48] Ibid., 183.
[49] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 39; *The Role of the Reader*, 192.
[50] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 39.

scends the traditional dichotomy between realism and idealism. To put it crudely, there is always *something* that is experienced (the 'realist aspect'), but this something is without exception perceived *as something* (the 'idealist aspect'). But even if the traditional dichotomy between realism and idealism is overcome, Oehler, unlike Eco and Simon, clings to the notion of an extra-linguistic reality to which the social consensus of the interpretative community *corresponds*. For Oehler, the habit is only a *provisory anticipation* of the final interpretant. That is to say, the social dimension of Peirce's "semiotic meliorism" *as such*, which manifests itself in the conviction of a directedness of the infinite series of interpretants, does not lead – not even in the long run – to an "ontology of the real".[51] In other words, a general consensus alone cannot guarantee that there is really a correspondence to reality. According to Oehler, Peirce does not regard the transition from one sign to better signs as a merely 'immanent clarification' of concepts for which the 'real' remains a utopian fiction. Rather, as Oehler's argues, Peirce emphatically rejects such a view, which he considers a nominalistic 'idealism of the sign' that unfortunately dominated much of modernity's philosophy. Above all, the American philosopher sees this theory as incapable of accounting for the phenomenon of science and its obvious progress. In full agreement with (*this* interpretation of) Peirce, Oehler underlines that no way leads from an idealistic or immanentist understanding of semiosis to *knowledge of the real* which is determined by signs: "The true signification differs from the wrong one in that it not only has a fundamentum in mente, but also a fundamentum in re".[52] Oehler here once again points to the differentiation between the immediate and the dynamical or mediate object. The immediate object is the object "as the Sign itself represents it, and whose Being is thus dependent upon the Representation of it in the Sign …" (*CP* 4.536). It is the idea or thought of an entity on which the sign is immediately based. The real or dynamical object however, is the real thing or the real situation, on which this idea or thought rests like on a 'bedrock'. It is that aspect of the object which is independent of all subjectivity and which corresponds to the immediate object. For Peirce clearly says that the real or mediate object must be seen as that which truly possesses certain qualities wholly independent of whether somebody *thinks* that these qualities can or cannot be attributed to this entity. Nonetheless, even the real or dynamical object remains in a certain sense dependent on human subjectivity insofar as it is only *manifest* in and through the immediate object – although the former is never exhaustively present in the latter.

Oehler admits that there is no one-to-one correlation between sign and external object since the immediate object is itself a sign whose meaning requires clarification by means of further signs. Yet this does not mean, he argues, that the immediate object is only given in a chain of interpretants that can be arbitrarily extended. Rather, in the case of semiotic truth, it is ontically grounded in the real or dynamical object which Peirce calls the 'bedrock'. It is therefore only a half-truth to say that signs always refer to other signs. According to Oehler, the truth-value of a statement which asserts that a transition from one sign to another is true, depends on a fundamentum in re which is not merely a

[51] K. Oehler, *Über Grenzen der Interpretation aus der Sicht des semiotischen Pragmatismus*, 64.
[52] Ibid., 64f.

sign but rather an entity that we conceive *in the mode* of signs. This approach is to be marked off from the notion that interpretation is just a clarification of something in ever new signs whereas the thing that is being thematized remains unfixed.[53] Elsewhere Peirce writes that although there are no 'things as such' that are not relative to the human mind, they nonetheless exist *independently* of this relation. "There is nothing […] to prevent our knowing outward things as they really are, and it is most likely that we do thus know them in numberless cases, although we can never be absolutely certain of doing so in any special case" (*CP* 5.311).

The following quotation sums up nicely Oehler's understanding of Peirce's Pragmaticism, which he clearly interprets in terms of a pragmatic *realism*.[54]

> Dieser semiotische Pragmatismus […] ist ein pragmatischer Realismus, für den die unbezweifelbare tragende Gemeinsamkeit unserer Handlungswelt ein fundamentum in re hat, diesseits aller möglichen Verschiedenheiten des Welterlebens in je eigenen »Interpretationswelten«. In seiner radikalisierten Form führt der Ansatz je eigener, gegeneinander isolierter, beziehungsloser »Interpretationswelten« zu einem extremen Relativismus der Interpretation, der keine Verbindung mehr zur Lebenswirklichkeit der Menschen hat und in diesem Sinne durch eine auffällige Weltfremdheit gekennzeichnet ist, eine Art von nominalistisch-idealistischem Narzißmus, der nicht frei ist von Manieriertheit.

Oehler thus stresses that philosophical concepts such as 'truth' and 'reference' must in the first place be interpreted *on the semantic level*.[55] And there are other notable Peirce scholars who construe Peirce's philosophy along similar lines. Like Oehler, Robert Almeder finds a sophisticated theory of correspondence in Peirce: "The opinion reached in the final opinion unlike opinions reached earlier, shall never be overthrown although the degree to which the final opinion *corresponds* to fact admits of indefinite (but not substantial) refinement".[56]

As can be seen in the above quotation, Oehler regards Peirce's realism not just as an abstract postulate. Rather, he believes that this theory does do justice to our experiences on the empirical level, which reveal that we all meet with the 'same' resistance, independent of our world-view and practice of interpretation. Accordingly, he not only talks of a *fundamentum in re* but also assumes that there is a unity to our world of action (singular): that which he calls *die unbezweifelbare tragende Gemeinsamkeit unserer Handlungswelt*.

In what follows I shall investigate whether such a view is convincing, and if so, how this unity-in-difference can be thought of.

B) Günter Abel's internal pluralism

In order to answer this question, it is advisable to heuristically distinguish between *different levels* of interpretation, as Oehler's colleagues Günter Abel and Hans Lenk suggest.[57] According to Abel, our (differing) notions of reality must be understood as *reali-*

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[53] Ibid., 66.
[54] Ibid., 70.
[55] The term semantics is not used here in its general sense as the discipline dealing with meaning but denotes that branch of semiotics which studies "the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable", Ch.W. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, 6.
[56] R. Almeder, *The Philosophy of Charles S. Peirce*, 52, my emphasis.
[57] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 26-39; *Interpretationswelten*, 14-19, 41, 45, 474-477, etc.; H. Lenk, *Interpretationskonstrukte als Interpretationskonstrukte*, 52; *Interpretation und Realität*.

ties of interpretation. Every concept of reality is shaped by the specific grammar and rules of the (linguistic and non-linguistic) system of symbolising signs of interpretation which we use and understand. We are thus always already located in an *interpretative horizon* and participate in an *interpretative practice*. Consequently, the boundary of our interpretation constitutes the boundary of meaning and of our world.[58]

Abel differentiates between *three* different levels of interpretation all of which manifest different worlds of interpretation – even though in a different way:

- The first level, which he calls *interpretations*$_3$, comprises construing-appropriating interpretations, such as the formation of hypotheses, theories, and the activity of explaining and reasoning.

- The second level, *interpretations*$_2$, consists of acquired interpretative habits, i.e. conventions and culturally and socially conditioned practices and competences.

- The third level, *interpretations*$_1$, encompasses those aspects of our language and use of signs that are category-forming and which have an individuating function. On this most fundamental level we find, for instance, the logical concepts of 'existence' or 'object', and the principles of spatio-temporal localisation and individuation.

The organisation of our experience is always based on interpretations$_1$. Accordingly, the horizon and practice of interpretation$_1$ determines what really exists in a particular world of interpretation and what is being recognised as an entity, an object or event, and what not. The mastery of a particular language thus locates the interpreter in a specific world of interpretation that is ultimately contingent, since the category-forming concepts as well as the principles of individuation vary from one world of interpretation to another. On the one hand, a world of interpretation opens up specific possibilities of perception, understanding and action, but at the same time imposes interpretative limits. Due to the fundamental character of this first level of interpretation, the creative-active dimension of interpretation$_1$ is implicit rather than explicit, and becomes only manifest when a particular world of interpretation is related to (an) other world(s) of interpretation.

As far as this last aspect is concerned, Simon is more consistently pragmatically orientated than Abel, for he refrains from making general statements about the interpretative nature of reality. It is *only* in a particular situation in which a hitherto unquestioned use of signs becomes problematic – due to the experience of other possibilities of interpretation – that we can really talk of two *different* interpretations, and therefore of *signs* and *interpretation*. Abel however, boldly extrapolates from human experiences of disagreement and cultural differences we meet in everyday life to a *transcendental systematics of (three) interpretative levels*. He thus goes beyond (the more modest claims of) a genuinely pragmatic or phenomenological approach, and to a certain extent tries to revive and reinterpret thought-models of the philosophical tradition such as the *categories* or *apriorische Anschauugsformen* within his philosophy of interpretation. In any way, Abel's distinction between three different levels of interpretation is a rather specu-

[58] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 26.

lative attempt at systematising the elusive character of interpretative processes of human life. But despite this reserve, it proves a useful tool for the issues discussed in this essay.

As long as the reasoning, explaining and construing on the plane of interpretations$_3$ is successful and comprehensible, there is no need to take recourse to interpretations$_{1+2}$, since these latter levels are implied in the conversation and presupposed by all interlocutors. It is only if a particular argument, which was supposed to explain something, is not immediately understandable that one has to resort to the level of interpretations$_{1+2}$; for the addressee will then ask questions about the meaning of certain signs used in the explanation. And these questions can only be answered by making explicit some of the presuppositions that governed the elucidation.

Furthermore, the relationship between these three levels of interpretation and the 'world' is different in each case. Interpretations$_3$, for instance scientific hypotheses, can directly fail due to the resistance of the world, thus compelling us to find more appropriate ones. Yet the replacement of one theory or hypothesis by another does not change the world but only our interpretations of it. Hence interpretations$_3$ are dependent on that which they interpret. Similarly, if the interpretations$_2$ vary, our world does not automatically alter. And even if the world changes in the sense that we come across new and hitherto unrecognised phenomena, this second level may not immediately lead to a modification of our world. Rather, what is characteristic of this second level are assignments of interpretations and worlds (*Zuweisungen*). If there is a shift on the plane of interpretations$_1$, however, our world changes too. As a result, it is not possible to conceive a language-independent world that remains entirely detached from our processes of interpretation$_1$, which amounts to saying that there is not just one world, but *a plurality of worlds*. Abel uses the term 'world' – echoing Kant's understanding of world, self and god as regulative ideas – in terms of a *limit concept* that is not accessible in the way we grasp phenomena *within* the world. Rather, it is the structure that orders these phenomena with regard to a certain *purpose*.[59]

In spite of the aforementioned differences, Abel's *internal pluralism* is in line with Josef Simon's approach. The underlying principle governing his explication of pluralism can be summarised as follows: "plurality occurs at the inside of the use of signs in the form of possible alterity".[60] It is unintelligible to ascribe to finite minds the ability to have an external, comprehensive overview over a wide variety of different worlds of interpretation. Rather, Abel advocates an *internal* pluralism, since the list of possible meanings of a sign is not once and for all fixed but in principle indefinitely modifiable and unlimited. Consequently, there is never just *one* right way of interpreting or translating a sign into other signs. Yet this is not to say that *any* interpretation is equally valid. Rather, the range of alterity is restricted by the pragmatic criterion of whether communication between the interlocutors is successful, i.e. if it leads to mutual understanding or not. This criterion can only be met if there is an interpreter who is sufficiently acquainted with his own language. He must be able to creatively produce, in a particular context, fitting and clarifying signs, which explain the sign that is at issue to

[59] Ibid., 26ff.
[60] Ibid., 243.

the respective addressee. And since not all transitions meet this criterion, there is no arbitrariness.[61] Yet it is not possible to establish rules on the basis of successful interpretative moves, for the relationship between the first and the consecutive or explanatory sign eludes any systematisation and formalisation. The relationship between *interpretandum* and *interpretans* is not determined and predictable but remains free. And it is this freedom which constitutes the basis for an internal pluralism. For the various ways of producing equally satisfactory but nonetheless irreconcilably different answer-signs with regard to a proceeding sign, manifest different worlds of interpretation. That is to say – as Abel explicitly points out – these conflicting transitions should not be viewed as different *interpretations* of one and the same world, but rather reveal different *worlds*.[62]

Nonetheless, Abel does *not* abandon the idea of the unity of the world, although he does distance himself clearly from the realist interpretation of Peirce. How then is this unity to be thought of? With respect to our 'being-in-the-world', he points out, and as regards certain presuppositions in our speaking, thinking and acting, it does make sense to talk about *the* world. Yet there is no criterion by means of which we can establish the identity between two or more different worlds which is independent of a particular practice of interpretation. Although every actual performance of thought, word and action necessarily implies the notion of 'one and the same world' (on the level of interpretations$_1$) – for otherwise we could not make sense of our lives – this does not mean that the world that is presupposed 'really exists' (in the sense of a *philosophical* realism). Rather, it would be unintelligible to draw a distinction between our interpretations$_1$ and the 'world itself'. Consequently, the positing of a single world is not necessitated *de re* but *de interpretatione*. To put this in other words, the fact that there are facts is itself not a fact that can be checked against a pre-interpretative world, but is essentially an *interpration*.[63]

From all this it follows that Abel leaves more room for a plurality of worlds than Oehler. The former explicitly rejects the view – which he associates with Peirce – that an appropriate and right interpretation is conditioned by a pre-interpretative entity, and that the chain of interpretation comes in the long run to an end when the 'thing itself' is arrived at.[64]

C) Klaus Oehler's unity of our 'world of action'

As mentioned above, Oehler clings to the notion of a unity of our world of action. Hence he has to answer the question what he means exactly when he talks of the *unbezweifelbare und tragende Gemeinsamkeit unserer Handlungswelt*. More precisely, the

[61] Abel comments on the above considerations: "Diese Überlegung gilt übrigens nicht nur für das Verhältnis von fraglich gewordenen Zeichen und es interpretierendem Folgezeichen. Sie gilt generell für das Verhältnis von Zeichen und anschließendem, fortsetzendem, abweichendem oder abbrechendem Folgezeichen", ibid., 246. Does this statement imply a critique of Simon, who emphasises that the distinction between a sign and its meaning *only* makes sense in situation of non-understanding? In order to answer this question one needs to define what 'non-understanding' actually means, and how it can be distinguished from other types of sign-transitions.
[62] Ibid., 243ff.
[63] Ibid., 252; G. Abel, *Intepretationswelten*, 374f, 474, 477, 505.
[64] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 41.

following issues need to be addressed: What kind of *community* has access to this reality? By means of which *method* does this infinite progress of knowledge approximate a true conception of reality? What kind of *objects* will this general and final consensus be about?

a) Community

Oehler's realist interpretation of Peirce tends to emphasise those aspects of his philosophy that mark him out as a *nineteenth century* thinker. For instance, Peirce incorporates into his approach elements of the theory of evolution and positivism. He undertakes a painstaking attempt at justifying scientific method, which is for him tantamount to a justification of induction and hypothesis. Accordingly, scientific research aims at articulating a comprehensive and conclusive system of true sentences which correspond to reality – even if such an ultimate consensus, as we have seen, will be based on conviction rather than proof and inevitably assumes an eschatological character.[65] As a result, the body of empirical scientists is elevated to the status of a community of truth-seekers, whose orientation has a 'religious' dimension. The general consensus which constitutes truth can neither be limited to the earthly life of human beings nor to the human species but rather comprises the *total community of spirits*, including those that might have quite different senses than us (*CP* 8.13). There is a sacred community of spirits that is in communion with God and which does not shy away from sacrificing its own limited views and beliefs to the communal project of achieving ultimate and general truth. For what is 'real' is not the individual's idiosyncrasy but the common beliefs which survive the process of elimination and refinement in the long run, and thus lead to the ideal perfection of knowledge (*CP* 5.356). Peirce further points out that although we hope to achieve an ultimate meaning about *every* question, this will not be possible within a finite period of time.[66]

Moreover, the idea of an *indefinite community* and its correlate, the *consensus catholicus*, is inspired by the notion of the Catholic Church and betrays Peirce's interest in medieval scholasticism, most notably Scotist realism. As mentioned in the last paragraph, the infinite community of interpreters transcends the finite individual as well as the finite community in order to fulfil its task – "the knowledge of the infinitely knowable real".[67] According to Peirce, all claims to truth are universal in scope and must in principle be publicly accessible and testable. And this ideal of universality is only realisable on the basis of a generally valid standard of rationality that renders all kinds of truth-claims which are merely grounded in the authority of an individual or a group unacceptable. For Peirce, the procedure by means of which universality and public accessibility can be safeguarded is that of the *empirical method* – although he understands it in a very broad sense so that it is applicable to all sorts of objects of investigation. In our scientific enquiries, we address certain questions and try to answer them by forming hypotheses. We then proceed by means of deductions and draw inferences which can be checked against the backdrop of the present circumstances. In other words, the meaning

[65] K. Oehler, *An Outline of Peirce's Semiotics*, 12f.
[66] K. Oehler, *Sachen und Zeichen*, 70f.
[67] Ibid., 72.

of a hypothesis can be explicated by the development of its practical consequences. That is to say its meaning takes on the form of actions and events. Accordingly, in order to test a hypothesis, we have to check to what extent our assumptions can stand up to experimental tests. This procedure can in principle be applied to every object, although the degree of accuracy will vary with the kind of entity that is under consideration. There is thus no qualitative difference between an empirical investigation into the nature of prayer and a scientific analysis of electric or magnetic phenomena.[68]

b) Method

In the 1860s Peirce still presumes that there is only one method according to which we can think and equates thinking with inferring, i.e. *induction*. In the 1870s however, he allows for further methods in the formation of beliefs so that induction is henceforth only one method among others (namely deduction and abduction). The selection of the appropriate method is determined by the scientific goals that we try to reach, i.e. whether a method allows us to effectively form convictions. But since the scientific goal is everywhere identical, all researchers will finally adapt the same method. This implies that all other methods will be left behind since they prove to be inadequate, and the 'real' is that on which everybody will finally agree.[69] In spite of the relativity of our sense experience we are capable of discovering how things really are. Accordingly, reality is to be thought of as the coincidence with the *ultimate opinion*, the *final belief*, or the *ideal perfection of knowledge*, which will be of universal validity – although the process of approximation will theoretically never come to an end (*CP* 5.311, 5.356). In other words, there are definite opinions about everything on which enquirers *would* agree *if* their enquiry would go on long enough. This ideal perfection of knowledge is to be thought of as a system of sentences which represents the ultimate result of scientific research. Accordingly, the general consensus remains the privilege of a small group of scientists who remain faithful to the empirical method by means of which it can be reached. Objective knowledge about the real world can only be gained in that all prejudices and subjective distortions in our perception of the real are successively eliminated.[70]

c) Object

As already indicated, the application of the empirical method, along with the principles of corrigibility and fallibilism, is relevant to all aspects of human life and by no means restricted to the sciences. So far as the history of ideas is concerned, even ideologies, i.e. all-comprehensive perspectives on the world are allegedly *falsifiable* insofar as they may fail to order reality successfully in the long run. This also gives us a clearer idea of what Oehler has in mind when he talks about the *unbezweifelbare tragende Gemeinsamkeit unserer Handlungswelt*. For Oehler makes the highly problematic assertion that the biologistic-racist ideology of National Socialism and the Marxist ideology of Socialism-Communism have been *refuted* by the reality of the human life-world itself. Ac-

[68] Ibid., 25f.
[69] Ibid., 66f.
[70] Ibid., 74f.

cording to him, the end of our historical and social utopia and the grand ideologies does not just negatively lead to disillusionment and disenchantment but is also a sign of intellectual maturity and social progress. Finally, Oehler fully approves of Peirce's attempt at furnishing his *pragmatic maxim* with a biblical underpinning: "It has been said to be a sceptical and materialistic principle. But it is only an application of the sole principle of logic which was recommended by Jesus; "Ye may know them by their fruits," and it is very intimately allied with the ideas of the gospel" (*CP* 5.402, fn 2).[71] It goes without saying that this is bad theology and one wonders why, if one follows Oehler, the secularization of the Western world could not also be interpreted in terms of a *refutation* of Christianity.

As we have seen, Simon's interpretation of Peirce is in line with Abel's internal pluralism. A sign that is understood *is* true and *does* reach reality, which is not to say that external objects only exist *because* of our interpretations. However, the question is not how signs can really refer to the world. Rather, we make the puzzling experience that reference to reality is always already given in a successful use of signs within a functioning interpretative praxis. Accordingly, we are not in a situation in which we still have to *establish* reference to reality and the world.[72] Moreover, Simon does not hesitate to talk about different and incompatible 'languages' for which there is no point of comparison. Yet as we have seen in Abel, this is not to say that different and incompatible worlds of interpretation exist *in isolation*. Rather, they are always already interrelated. I shall come back to this issue in chapter 3.

D) A pluralist reading of Peirce

It is not entirely clear whether Simon's radically pluralist reading of Peirce can really be exegetically substantiated. Yet there is no need for such a justification because Simon's philosophy of the sign is not in the first place an interpretation of Peirce's work. Rather, he develops a philosophy in his own right, into which he incorporates insights from Peirce as well as other thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Kant, etc. But one easily finds commentators whose interpretations of Peirce point in the same direction. In what follows I shall briefly discuss a pluralist reading of Peirce that *can* be regarded as an exegetical commentary (on some aspects of his work). However, it will become clear that this pluralist reading differs somewhat from Simon's philosophy of the sign or Abel's internal pluralism.

Sandra B. Rosenthal emphasises the perspectival character of truth in Peirce, for "even the ideal of convergence to a final ultimate opinion, to perfect knowledge, is always convergence *within an accepted framework or perspective*".[73] She argues that even ideally true knowledge could not be conceived of in terms of correspondence since the way we relate to the world is always mediated by conceptual structures. Although the questions we pose can be answered on the basis of reality, the answers we get are partially dependent on the questions we ask. More precisely, Rosenthal tries to show that Peirce holds *at once* that, first, the perceived world is the real world (*CP* 3.527),

[71] Ibid., 254.
[72] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 49.
[73] S.B. Rosenthal, *Charles Peirce's Pragmatic Pluralism*, 11. Italics mine. I am following ibid., 1-20.

secondly, that the real world exists independently of the human mind, and thirdly, that the perceived world is still partially dependent on the noetic act and thus always relative to the human mind. These seemingly contradictory statements can only be held together if one abandons the traditional dichotomy between realism and idealism and realism and non-realism. The fact that Peirce's philosophy transcends both alternatives is borne out by his distinction between two different kinds of possibilities, which determine which experiences are possible and which not.

On the one hand, 'possible' means *consistently thinkable*. That which can occur in the sensible or real world is made possible but also limited by the ideal world which forms a system of ideas (*CP* 3.527). Everything that takes place in the sensible or real world must be possible and conform to the standards laid down by the ideal world, but not vice versa. More concretely, this means that what is held to be true *cannot* be self-contradictory and *must* be consistent with everything else we know about the real world. Hence we know in advance of experience that certain things are a priori not true since they are impossible even in the ideal world. On the other hand there is the independently real which determines what is *metaphysically possible* within the real world. In other words, there is a reality that is independent of our thinking and which exerts an influence on how we think and talk about it, although the facts and objects it entails are partially dependent on the conceptual framework of the world we inhabit. Now all depends on how these two restrictive factors which constitute reality, the consistently thinkable and the metaphysically possible, are interrelated.

Peirce's differentiation between *occurrences* and *facts* helps to clarify what is at stake. An occurrence is necessarily real but "can never be known or even imagined in all its infinite detail. A Fact, on the other hand is so much of the real Universe as can be represented in a Proposition …".[74] Accordingly, the realm of the consistently thinkable constitutes a *subset* of the metaphysically possible which is a more general category. This at least seems to follow from Rosenthal's interpretation of Peirce. She points out that the real world *is*, metaphysically speaking, the independently real. Yet a world is also, epistemically speaking, dependent on the meaning system which allows only for a very limited range of facts and objects. In other words, a world is that aspect of an infinitely rich reality that has been 'carved out' by the organising structure of ideas: "Knowledge is abstractive and selective".[75] Therefore, alternative systems are always possible and will give rise to different possibilities within reality, thus constituting different worlds. Facts, once again, are selected aspects or portions of the broader and more general continuum of occurrences, which makes clear that the relationship between facts and occurrences must be thought of in terms of a *part-whole relation*. As we will see in a moment, it is for this reason that Rosenthal's pluralist interpretation of Peirce cannot be equated with Abel's internal pluralism.

Thus, according to Rosenthal, a world is a delineated realm within which a limited range of facts and experiences can occur. On the one hand, it is rooted in the independently real and the possibilities this reality presents, on the other hand, its contours are

[74] Quoted in ibid., 5 [(MS 647, 8) = The Microfilm Edition of the Peirce Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University (manuscript and page number)]. My emphasis.
[75] Ibid., 7.

shaped by the mode by means of which we have access to the independently real and the possibilities this approach opens up. As a consequence, truth must be thought of as perspectival and convergence only occurs within a common world we have partly created ourselves (cf. *CP* 5.566). Even the achievement of perfect knowledge, the arrival at a final ultimate opinion and general consensus is still a convergence within a specific and limited framework or perspective.

This also has consequences for Peirce's understanding of science and scientific 'progress'. He points out that we never test claims in isolation but always against a background of other beliefs which we do not question at the same time (*CP* 5.265). Emerging discrepancies between a theory and observation can either be interpreted as an observational error or as an indication that the theory needs to be altered (*CP* 1.132, 1.73). Thus the interconnected meanings of conceptual structure determine what can conceivably be detected in empirical research, but empirical research can nonetheless lead to the abandonment or alteration of a set of meanings. No belief we hold is immune from change in the face of emerging counter-evidence, yet every belief can be retained despite this counter-evidence by changing other parts of the meaning structure. "Whether we change empirical generalizations in the face of disconfirming facts or restructure a set of meanings to allow the emergence of new facts is not itself dictated by the evidence, but is a pragmatic "decision" operative within the context of the encompassing intentional unity of humans and their world".[76]

Scientific revolutions are good examples of the emergence of new conceptual structures and new meanings which regulate what can be conceived and perceived as a fact. Peirce's uses the term *cataclysmal evolution*, which – unlike Darwinian and Lamarckian evolution – denotes a development with radical breaks that are nonetheless not haphazard. As indicated above, these breaks either occur due to some new observational data or because of a new way of reasoning (*CP* 1.109). This understanding of evolution is by no means limited to the biological sphere. Peirce explicitly writes: "This mode of evolution, by external forces and the breaking up of habits […] has been the chief factor in the historical evolution of institutions as in that of ideas" (*CP* 6.17). Furthermore, Peirce by no means ontologically privileges science but rather regards it as a second-order abstraction which is *grounded in* the world of common sense (*CP* 5.522). Peirce even goes so far as to say that "the instinctive result of human experience ought to have so vastly more weight than any scientific result …" (*CP* 5.522). Yet the truths held in the common sense world remain relatively vague compared to scientific truths and are therefore also less prone to be overthrown. For this reason the incommensurable scientific worlds share a common meaningfulness which is rooted in the common sense world.

Provided a community is operating within a common conceptual framework, it is indeed possible that the investigation of a particular object may tend toward an ideal convergence. Yet if there are incompatible structures of meaning in use among the investigators, this will lead to experiences of different facts and a convergence cannot occur. The only criterion for adequacy is workability, and workability can only be established within a particular network of beliefs. For this reason there may well be a plurality of

[76] Ibid., 14.

different views among interpreters on one and the same issue. Yet these differing and incompatible presuppositions are not always manifest so that the lines of demarcation between incommensurable worlds remain hidden. Hence the illusion may arise that a general consensus can be reached by collecting 'facts' which lead to indubitable evidence for one position rather than another. Yet such a view overlooks the essentially pluralistic character of all scientific endeavours. Furthermore, there might not only be incommensurable perspectives as regards the conceptual framework but also differing methods, standards, criteria and kinds of problems that are considered worth being tackled.

Rosenthal here sees parallels between Peirce's pragmatic pluralism and Kuhn's idea of incommensurability as set out in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: the "divergent perspectives have indeed carved out divergent worlds – be they divergent scientific worlds or divergent ways of life encompassing not just differing facts but differing goals, differing problems of importance, and differing criteria for resolving differences".[77] This is clearly to read Peirce against those interpreters who see him as a proponent of a cumulative-convergence theory. The latter approach is diametrically opposed to Kuhn's thesis of arbitrary change and incommensurability.

E) Conclusions

The main aim of this last section was to adduce further evidence for the legitimacy of a pluralist interpretation of Peirce. As regards Rosenthal's pre-reflective foundation, there may be parallels with Oehler's emphasis on the indubitable common ground of our world of action. Nonetheless, in Rosenthal, as in Simon, there is considerably more room for a plurality of worlds than in Oehler, whose interpretation comes close to the cumulative-convergence approach *rejected* by Rosenthal.

What solely matters here, however, is to find an interpretation of Peirce that renders his Pragmaticism suitable for the theological considerations of this essay. The precise way in which this will be carried out shall become clear in the course of the argument. For the present moment it suffices to draw the following preliminary and tentative conclusions: *In order to keep Christian theology free from any kind of metaphysical foundationalism, a pluralist reading of Peirce is preferable to Oehler's interpretation*.

Whereas Abel construes Peirce similar to Oehler – and rejects him for exactly this reason[78], Simon's reading of Peirce does allow for a plurality of different 'languages' (or worlds) that do not converge but which are internally related and comes thus close to Abel's internal pluralism. As far as Rosenthal's interpretation is concerned, there are similarities as well as differences to Abel's model. The notion of a 'world', which Rosenthal understands as a system of concepts (or a structure of meanings) that is constitutive of the facts and objects occurring within it, resembles Abel's level of interpretation$_1$. The system of interpretation$_1$ is most fundamental in the sense that we cannot alter it voluntarily. Hence the objects emerging within it are neither subject to our will nor generated by our interpretations$_{2+3}$. In other words, these objects and facts do have

[77] Ibid., 17f.
[78] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 41.

an interpretative character but are at the same time independent of conscious human decision and deliberation. For this reason Abel calls them *empirically real* and emphasise that the philosophy of interpretation is compatible with an empirical realism.[79]

On the other hand there seems to be a decisive difference between Abel and Rosenthal's interpretation of Peirce as regards the question of a *world of worlds*. Both at times use a similar terminology and point out that our interpretations (Abel's interpretation$_1$) *carve out* different worlds – a verb that clearly implies that alternative 'cuts' are possible and that no framework does exhaustively describe reality.[80] Yet this is where the similarities end. For Rosenthal finds in Peirce the concept of the metaphysically possible or the independently real, which must be regarded as *the* reality encompassing all perspectival sections of reality carved out by various communities of interpreters. By contrast, Abel's internal pluralism does not allow for such a metaphysical grounding, although he does not want to dispense with the notion of a unity of the world either. According to him, the idea of the *one world* must be understood *syncategorematically*, i.e. it is a posited *world of interpretation of worlds of interpretations* that is itself an interpretation – though practically and theoretically indispensable and always already related to plurality.

F) Synchrony

The starting point of these considerations was the question of the *diachronic* transition of signs to other signs. Yet, these brief reflections on realism and pluralism are equally relevant to the *synchronic* termination of the chain of interpretants. Thus, in this chapter, the insights of the above discussion are presupposed. But there are also a number of questions which specifically pertain to the synchronic dimension of sign production. To these I shall turn now.

From a *synchronic* perspective, the chain of interpretations comes temporarily to a close when we make a decision at a particular point in time, resulting in an action. The process of replacing a not fully understood sign by another one, which may itself be in need of a further explanatory sign and so forth, terminates, since there is finally nothing more that is not understood, i.e. the 'last' sign is immediately understandable. At this point a particular *x* is interpreted as *a* rather than as *b* or *c* or *d* etc., and the "interpretation of something as something becomes, "for the moment" […] ontologically hard".[81] The process of decision-making is brought to an end and all speculations and opinions as to what *x* may be are left behind. Yet at the next moment this may change again. For instance, the action-sign generates further 'signs of consequences', indicating to the interpreter 'what' he has done. These new insights may well lead him to re-consider the previous decision and to resume the process of interpretation.

From Simon's pragmatic perspective, 'reference to reality' coincides with the successful interpretation of a sign at a particular time, i.e. when immediate understanding is achieved. The final interpretation reaches reality and is therefore true. By contrast, signs

[79] G. Abel, *Interpretationswelten*, 519.
[80] Cf. "Jedes Aussortieren, wie gut auch jeweils begründet, kann als das Legen von Interpretations-Schnitten angesehen werden", ibid., 497.
[81] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, 283f.

whose meanings are still ambiguous do stand at a distance from 'reality'. There are two different ways in which the concatenation of interpretations can be terminated, although this differentiation is implied in Simon's differentiation rather then explicitly stated.

a) The chain of signs comes to an end because a sign is comprehensible to such an extent that an action, i.e. the production of an action-sign, can be reasonably risked. In other words, not the time factor but the *degree of comprehensibility* precipitates the interpreter into action. For instance, John and Jane only get married when both of them manage to 'interpret' their fiancé(e) 'continuously' as their future spouse, and there is in principle no time limit to this process of clarification apart from social convention and their own patience.

It goes without saying that there is a *diachronic* dimension to this process of decision-making, even if it is here discussed under the heading of *synchrony*. Nonetheless, the decision itself, often made after a long and complex procedure, involving various people, is to be thought of as a *punctual event*, taking place at *one* particular moment in time. For this reason it seems appropriate to analyse it from a synchronic perspective.

Now common experience reveals that the kind of existential-pragmatic certainty required to enter into marriage does occur occasionally. And it would be absurd to seek 'absolute' certainty beyond the consent arrived at on the cognitive and emotional level. But, recalling what was said in the preceding chapters, this certainty can of course only occur if it is aimed at and regarded as desirable by a particular culture – as it is the case with Christian faith.

b) The chain of interpretation comes necessarily to a conclusion because there is *no time (left)* for individual reflection, dialogue with other people, and the consultations of experts. That is to say, it is the *pressure of time* which ends the chain of interpretation. In this second case, human finitude is to a certain degree experienced as a lack or a deficiency with which we have to come to terms. Typical examples of this second mode of decision-making are the judgments required of drivers, pilots, managers, sportspeople and military strategists. Once again, in both cases the interpreter does not reach "a final end of all reflection" in the sense of a definitive "*concept of things themselves*".[82] Rather, his decision can 'only' be pragmatically justified.

[82] Ibid., 284.

2 The interpretant

As already indicated, the interpretant is that which the sign produces in the interpreter. In accordance with his triadic understanding of the sign, Peirce also distinguishes between three main types of interpretants.

First there is the *immediate* interpretant, which he takes to be "the *Quality* of the Impression that a sign is fit to produce, not to any actual reaction" (*CP* 8.315). In other words, the immediate interpretant falls into the category of 'firstness' and is therefore a semantic potentiality. It is the effect a sign has on the interpreter if we abstract from all analyses and interpretations to which it may give rise or to which it may be expected to give rise. The immediate interpretant is spontaneously generated without any reflection by the interpreter. Secondly, the *dynamical* interpretant denotes the actual and direct effect a sign has on its interpreter and which occurs in each act of interpretation. Each dynamical interpretant differs from every other. Thirdly, the *final* interpretant, an expression of 'thirdness', is associated with the concepts of habit and law, and is defined as "that which *would finally* be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached" (*CP* 8.184).

According to Eco, the idea of an interpretant coupled with the notion of unlimited semiosis frees a theory of signification from its attachment to a metaphysics of the referent and allows a definition of meaning as *cultural unit*. That is to say, the meaning of meaning can be thought of without taking resort to reference and extension. As Eco puts it: "*Every time there is the possibility of lying, there is a sign-function*: which is to signify (and then to communicate) something to which no real state of things corresponds".[83] The study of meanings thus leads to an examination of the linguistic and non-linguistic sedimentations of a culture, its texts, artefacts and technical achievements so that the entirety of human production can be viewed as a text to be interpreted. If a single term or object is under consideration, one has to take into account the total diachronic and synchronic accumulation of meanings, which it acquired in the course of time. In other words, an encyclopaedic understanding of meaning is preferable to that of a dictionary. Whereas the latter is based on the ideal competence of an ideal sign user, the former tries to take into account all the living contradictions and ambiguities that mark a semiotic system, which can only be disentangled and disambiguated by circumstantial and contextual factors.[84] This difference roughly corresponds to what has been called the transition from an *ideal language philosophy* to that of an *ordinary language philosophy*.

Now the shift from a representamen to an interpretant, which turns itself into a representamen and so forth, does of course always involve human beings who *perform* these interpretative moves. Yet as Simon and Abel argue, this does not imply that the interpreter is always actively and consciously engaged in a process of decision-making about how a particular object should be interpreted. Rather, most of the time we simply reiterate an interpretative pattern which we have internalised with our upbringing and modi-

[83] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 58.
[84] U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 46-86.

fied or refined by virtue of our own ideological, ethical, religious or other choices and preferences. This is what Peirce calls the *habit*. Nonetheless, we are often faced with unprecedented occurrences and unfamiliar situations in which active and conscious interpretative labour *is* required. As we have seen, it is possible to heuristically differentiate between various levels of interpretation. That is to say, some of our interpretations are most fundamental, i.e. reality-constitutive, and accordingly almost unchangeable, while others can and must be continually altered in order to do justice to the changing circumstances. Thus Abel distinguishes between three, Lenk even between six different levels of interpretation that can be correlated to each other.[85]

Keeping these sophisticated approaches in mind, it is possible to distinguish between two types of interpretative 'newness', which are related to different hermeneutical situations. The first type encompasses signs that are not fully comprehensible and which therefore need to be translated into further signs so as to incorporate them into our own interpretative perspective. Consequently, it is the *interpretandum* itself which is (to a certain degree) 'new' and therefore defies immediate appropriation. In the second case, there is a *change of perspective*, i.e. an object that has already been interpreted in a particular way is for some reason construed differently; i.e. it is seen in a *new light*. And if the interpreter finds this new way of interpreting more convincing and more appealing than the interpretative practice he so far adhered to, he might start to interpret everything within this new framework. The interpretative framework or horizon itself, however, is never given in its entirety but rather gradually emerges the more entities the interpreter comes to see in its light.

In both types of hermeneutical newness, object and interpretative framework cannot be separated. On the one hand, in order to interpret a 'new object', i.e. a not fully comprehensible sign, I need to understand *something* about it; otherwise there will be no process of interpretation whatsoever. Put differently, unless we are *right from the beginning* able to partly symbolise a novel object within the world of interpretation which we are already familiar with, it cannot be appropriated. Thus even a *new* object to a certain degree always already emerges within the interpretative framework of the interpreter who faces this newness. On the other hand, every transition from one interpretative perspective on the world to another is inevitably mediated by a new perception and interpretation of a particular *object*, or a group of particular objects. Thus the idea of *absolute newness*, be it an absolutely *new object*, or an absolutely *new perspective* on the world is unintelligible.

A) Types of interpretants

It is not the aim of this chapter to tackle the immensely complex issue of how the shift from one all-comprehensive perspective on the world to another can be conceptualised. Rather, the focus will be on the transition from *one interpretant to another*, particularly if the act of interpretation entails *heteromaterial sign-vehicles*. In other words, the production of interpretants by the interpreter, motivated by a sign, may require various

[85] Cf. H. Lenk, *Interpretationskonstrukte als Interpretationskonstrukte*, 52.

kinds and degrees of *competence* and *creativity*. Eco distinguishes between the following cases:[86]

a) The interpretant can be an equivalent sign-vehicle in another semiotic system. For instance, the word /dog/[87] is 'translated' into a drawing of a dog. Evidently, this transition involves a creative act on the part of the interpreter that requires great interpretative labour.

b) Or the interpretant can be an *index* which denotes a single object. Interestingly, Eco is convinced that even *indices* have semantic markers and therefore do signify already before they are used in a particular context and under certain circumstances. In a subtle analysis he tries to show that not only terms like /this/ and /that/ but even non-verbal devices such as a pointing finger can be semantically explicated. For according to Eco, linguistic meaning, even that of syncategorematic terms, is utterly independent of the question of reference. It is only when the focus is on an *extensional semantics*, i.e. on the truth-value of an expression that the issue of reference must be taken into account.[88]

c) The interpretant may also assume the form of a scientific definition of a word within the same semiotic system. For instance, a scientist explains that the word /salt/ signifies «sodium chloride». Needless to say that this interpretation too requires a highly specific competence, namely the ability to carry out, or at least to understand, certain experiments which show that the substance called salt reacts under such and such circumstances in such and such a way. It is only against the backdrop of these experimental results that the definition of salt as sodium chloride becomes meaningful. For each time salt is called sodium chloride, all this background knowledge is implied. The fact that the (scientific) meanings of an object must be seen as the sum of the ways it reacts in various experimental contexts is well illustrated in Peirce's famous example of the chemical-physical definition of lithium:

> If you look into a textbook of chemistry for a definition of *lithium* you may be told that it is that element whose atomic weight is 7 very nearly. But if the author has a more logical mind he will tell you that if you search among minerals that are vitreous, translucent, grey or white, very hard, brittle, and insoluble, for one which imparts a crimson tinge to an unluminous flame, this mineral being triturated with lime or witherite rats-bane, and then fused, can be partly dissolved in muriatic acid; and if this solution be evaporated, and the residue be extracted with sulphuric acid, and duly purified, it can be converted by ordinary methods into a chloride, which being obtained in the solid state, fused, and electrolyzed with half a dozen powerful cells, will yield a globule of a pinkish silvery metal that will float on gasolene; and the material of *that* is a specimen of lithium" (*CP* 2.330).

d) The interpretant can be an *emotive association* which may come to be regarded by a culture as a firmly established connotation. For instance, the word /dog/ signifies «fidelity».

e) But the interpretant may also be a translation of a word into another language, such as from English, /dog/, into German, «Hund». Or it is simply a substitution by a synonym, e.g. when we replace the word /computer/ by «word processor».

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[86] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 70.

[87] Following Eco, single slashes /xxx/ indicate that a term is considered as a sign-vehicle (expression), whereas guillemets «xxx» show that a term is taken as content.

[88] Ibid., 58-68, 115-121, 163-165.

However, besides the fact that the above list constitutes only a small selection of types of interpretants, it would be inadequate to reduce the interpretant simply to the entire range of denotations and connotations – for this would impoverish Peirce's understanding of semiosis. According to him, not only translations, but also complex discourses such as inferences fall into the category of the interpretant. In fact, the interpretant, as the meaning of the sign that is interpreted, comprises all the possible contexts into which it can be potentially inserted. It is worth recalling here Peirce's trichotomy between the *rheme*, the *dicent* and the *argument* which is organised according to the categories of 'Firstness', 'Secondness' and 'Thirdness'.

The rheme corresponds to what the logical tradition called 'term' and is "any sign that is not true nor false, like almost any single word except 'yes' or 'no' …" (*CP* 8.337). It is a simple or substitutive sign (*CP* 2.309) that represents "such and such a kind of possible Object. Any Rheme, perhaps, will afford some information; but it is not interpreted as doing so" (*CP* 2.250). A dicent corresponds to what the tradition called proposition and is an informational sign (*CP* 2.309) but does not *assert* anything (*CP* 8.337). It is either true or false but does not adduce any reasons for being so (*CP* 2.310). Finally, there is the argument which Peirce calls "a Sign of law" (*CP* 2.252) which states "that the passage from all such premises to such conclusions tends to the truth" (*CP* 2.263).

Now everything that can be said of a dicent or argument is potentially present in the rheme which constitutes them so that the content of a term assumes an encyclopaedic character. For instance, the rheme 'man' can be interpreted as 'mortal' – among many other possibilities of course – and may therefore be regarded as a component of the *dicent* 'all men are mortal'. Yet it can also be taken as an element of the syllogism 'all men are mortal, Socrates is a man, hence Socrates is mortal' and is then part of an argument. Both examples must be seen as interpretants and therefore meanings of the rheme 'man' (cf. *CP* 2.342, 2.344). Put differently, *the intension of a sign is the sum total of all synthetic propositions in which a sign can figure as a subject or predicate*. And in increasing our knowledge of an object, its semantic features gradually grow in the sense of a snowball effect, although it may in the same process also *discard* certain meanings that were hitherto attributed to it (*CP* 2.222).

B) The final interpretant or habit

Let me once again turn to the final interpretant, whose function is of utmost importance to understand Peirce's semiosis.[89] A naïve realism presupposes that there can be a one-to-one correlation between a sign and the object which it stands for. In Peirce, however, this possibility is excluded right from the beginning, since any recognition of an object requires previous experience of it so that no 'immediate contact' can be established (*CP* 8.181, 2.231). Thus there is the question as to how the dynamic object, which belongs to the 'external world', can be represented by a sign. For as Peirce himself remarks, the sign can only be a sign of an object "in so far as that object is itself of the nature of a sign or thought …" (*CP* 1.538). In order to answer this question, Eco refers to the end

[89] I am following U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 191ff.

of Peirce's definition of lithium where he writes: "The peculiarity of this definition […] is that it tells you what the word lithium denotes by prescribing what you are to *do* in order to gain a perceptual acquaintance with the object of the word" (*CP* 2.330). It follows that within Peirce's pragmatic framework, the meaning of a sign leads to the performance of a set of actions which will give rise to certain perceptible effects. In other words, the idea of meaning cannot be separated from the notion of purpose, which renders reality a *result* rather than a datum (cf. *CP* 5.166).

A sign calls forth a series of immediate responses in the interpreter which gradually develop into a *habit*, i.e. a certain pattern of behaviour. As we have seen, Peirce defines the habit as "a tendency […] to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances in the future" (*CP* 5.487) and identifies it with the *logical* (or *final*) *interpretant* (*CP* 5.491). This amounts to saying that the link between the representamen and its (final) interpretant consists in a *law* (of behaviour). Accordingly, to understand the meaning of a sign entails the skills to carry out those actions which constitute a situation that allows one to have the experiences of the object which the sign stands for. Generally speaking, the term habit denotes "an ordered and regulated way of being".[90] All things exhibit a tendency to assume habits so that even natural laws can be viewed as the result of 'habit taking'.

Eco rejects the idea that the distinction between the immediate, the dynamical and the final interpretant corresponds to the differentiation between the emotional, the energetic and the logical one. According to him, Peirce did not provide us with a systematic classification of interpretants. Eco's own understanding of the emotional and the energetic interpretant can be summarised as follows. If we listen to a piece of music, its enchanting power will normally motivate us to produce emotional interpretants, but it may also induce energetic interpretants in the form of a muscular or mental effort. An energetic interpretant, Eco presumes, does not need to be interpreted but rather produces, in the case of further repetitions, a *change of habit*. In other words, after we have been exposed to a series of signs, and after we have interpreted them in a wide variety of different ways, our way of acting is temporarily or permanently changed, and this new attitude, this new interpretative *habit* is the *final (or logical) interpretant* (*CP* 5.476). It follows from this that the habit resolves the problem of how the gap between semiosis and the physical world can be bridged. As we have seen, a simple one-to-one correlation between sign and object is no longer a viable option for Peirce's triadic understanding of semiosis. Rather, it is now *human action* that establishes the link between semiosis and the physical world. This means that Eco, unlike Oehler, but similar to Simon, does not consider the habit to be merely a preliminary stage that will finally be superseded by a set of propositions on which a community of researchers unanimously agrees (even if the principle of corrigibility and fallibilism can never be discarded). Rather, reference and correspondence no longer figure as factors which are meaning-constitutive, for in order to grasp the meaning of a term we have to take recourse to human action.

Moreover, it is worth noticing that Peirce distinguishes between single actions and the habit as a general rule: "The habit alone, which though it may be a sign in some

[90] Ibid., 192.

other way, is not a sign in that way in which that sign of which it is the logical interpretant is the sign. The habit conjoined with the motive and the conditions has the action for its energetic interpretant; but the action cannot be a logical interpretant, because it lacks generality" (*CP* 5.491).

However, semiosis does not really end with the final/logical interpretant. As we have seen in the above quotation, individual action lacks generality. But habitually and consistently repeated action forming a habit, *can* be examined and described in general terms. Yet in order to do so we have to establish *further* precepts which will lead to *further* actions. As a result, the final interpretant or habit, which consists in the repeated actions of an interpreter who responds to a given sign, turns *itself* into a representamen that will generate further interpretants and thus re-initiate the process of interpretation. Hence the "Peircean notion of interpretant takes into account, not only the synchronic structure of semiotic systems, but also the diachronic destructuralization and restructuralization of those systems".[91]

The process of such a *de- and restructuralization* has been described by Roland Barthes.

C) The destructuralization and restructuralization of semiotic systems

In an early collection of essays published in 1957, *Mythologies*, Barthes expresses his unease "at the sight of the naturalness with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history".[92] What is presented as *the* reality is in truth a historically conditioned world-view, which is misleadingly identified with nature itself. This confusion between nature and history, resulting in an "ideological abuse", Barthes calls *myth*.[93]

He defines it further as "language"[94], "a type of speech", "a system of communication", "a message", or "a mode of signification".[95] But whereas in his earlier book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Barthes's object of investigation was the literature of French classicism, he now turns to explicitly non-linguistic phenomena such as the face of Greta Garbo, wrestling, the Tour de France, or wine production in North Africa. The range of semiology (or semiotics), a term borrowed from Saussure, is no longer confined to oral or written discourse, but comprises photographs, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity etc.

According to him, myth is a semiological system which is parasitic upon another one, i.e. it is "*a second-order semiological system*".[96] In a later work which is more directly concerned with semiotic issues than *Mythologies*, systems of secondary meaning are interpreted in terms of *connotative semiotics*. Barthes's theory of connotation has already been outlined above and is the key concept in his understanding of myth.

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[91] U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 195.
[92] R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 7.
[93] Ibid., 7f.
[94] Ibid., 7.
[95] Ibid., 215.
[96] Ibid., 114.

Every system of signification consists of *E*, expressions (or signifiers), *C*, contents (or signifieds), and the relations between *E* and *C*, *R*.[97] *ERC* thus forms the primary sign-system. This primary sign-system can be pressed into the service of a second, more comprehensive sign-system so that Barthes speaks of 'staggered systems'. There are two fundamentally different ways in which the first and the second system can be related to each other, depending on the "point of insertion", as Barthes calls it.[98] In the first case, the primary system ($E_1R_1C_1$) turns into the *expression* of the secondary system: E_2 *(=*$E_1R_1C_1$*)* R_2C_2. The first level is that of *denotation*, the second that of *connotation*. In the second case, the first system ($E_1R_1C_1$), called *object-language*, becomes the *content* of the second one: $E_2R_2C_2$ *(=*$E_1R_1C_1$*)* which is the *meta-language* of the object-language.[99]

In the first part of his *Mythologies,* Barthes presents the results of his own meta-linguistic analysis of various phenomena of modern society. That is to say, he works as a mythologist and takes the primary sign ($E_1R_1C_1$) to be the content (C_2) of a new expression (E_2). Inspired by the 'masters of suspicion' Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, he tries to decipher the secret codes of the bourgeoisie. The unmasking of the illusion of objective innocence and naturalness is clearly a political, and more specifically, a left-wing undertaking.[100] Put differently, the "bourgeoisie conceals itself as bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth".[101] Revolution, however, makes itself openly known as revolution and thus *abolishes* myth. Yet when left-wing politics loses its revolutionary character, it may well degenerate into myth too. More importantly, Barthes does *not* view Marxism as the ultimate 'master code', which brings all interpretive endeavours to a definitive end.[102] Rather, the 'objectivity' gained by the mythologist who unmasks the *false* descriptive objectivity of bourgeois myth is only relative and provisional, as each layer of meaning contains "the seeds of its own death …".[103] In other words, every meta-language can in principle become the object-language of a new meta-language, which will again turn into an object-language and so forth *ad infinitum*. Accordingly, Barthes speaks of a "diachrony of meta-languages" which can be historically reconstructed.[104]

[97] The helpful abbreviations are borrowed from W. Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics*, 310f.
[98] R. Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 89.
[99] Ibid., 89-94.
[100] R. Barthes*, Mythologies*, 41f, 86, 189-191.
[101] R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 255.
[102] Although in *Mythologies* (published in 1957) there are still tendencies in this direction, cf. 254-257.
[103] R. Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 93.
[104] Ibid.

3 Interpretative perspectives – worlds of interpretation

A) Levels of generality

Now let us look at these processes of diachronic and synchronic sign-production from a different angle. The meaning-signs that we generate when we are faced with not fully comprehended signs, as well as the questions which precipitate this sign-production, reveal the interpreter's *world-view*, the *interpretative perspective* or the *world of interpretation* he inhabits. For an interpreter with a different world-view, being confronted with the 'same' object[105], would either ask different questions, or answer the same questions in a different way, or not raise any questions at all. Furthermore, he would probably pause and start pondering on issues the first interpreter passed over, since there was nothing that struck him. It is possible to distinguish between *different degrees of generality* as regards the question of interpretative differences.

a) There is the level of *individual* interpretative practices that differ from person to person, but which are only comprehensible against the background of a shared language. After all, there is no such thing as a private language. This is in principle the level of pragmatics (in the narrow sense), for the polysemy of a term can ultimately only be disambiguated by circumstantial and contextual factors which depend on a particular situation in space and time. In Abel's terminology, the individual usage of signs as well as the interpretation of individual signs and expressions, for instance when we try to understand the meaning of the words uttered by a speaker, are located on the level of interpretation$_3$.[106] Under *certain* circumstances, although by no means under *all* circumstances, it suffices to focus on the individual differences between the interpretative horizons and practices of the interlocutors. This is not to revert to the much-criticised notion "that the isolated individual subject … [is] … the fount and origin of all meaning …", thereby ignoring that language is much less our product than we are the product of language.[107] Rather, what is needed is a pragmatically motivated sensitivity as to which level of generality is really relevant in order to settle a particular problem or dispute. This does not call in question the current trend in contemporary philosophy and theology to regard thought-categories such as 'tradition', 'life-world', 'culture' or 'world of interpretation' as the intellectually most fruitful ones.

Joseph Simon, for instance, in an essay examining the relation between Kant's transcendental philosophy and his own philosophy of the sign, focuses almost exclusively

[105] Since, within this Peircian framework, an object comes always already interpreted, it is inaccurate to speak of the 'same' object. Rather, the 'common' object only emerges when two or more interpretative perspectives overlap diachronically or synchronically. An accumulation of interpretations from different perspectives intensifies the web of determination (of an intended object) so that they gain gradually a common referent. It thus enables us to distinguish between object and interpretation *within* this combination of perspectives.
[106] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 72.
[107] T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 93.

on individual criteria of comprehensibility and 'fittingness'.[108] When and for what reason a particular explanation is satisfactory, differs from subject to subject, since their viewpoints and interests vary, resulting in different needs of explanation. Whereas one person is perfectly satisfied with a particular elucidation, another one may require (a) further explanation(s) in order to establish a link between the not fully understood sign and his or her own interpretative framework (Abel's interpretation$_{1+2}$). If this move is successful, the answer-sign produced by the interpreter in order to interpret the not fully understood sign does not itself require a further explanatory sign but is 'self-effacing' insofar as it brings the process of (conscious) interpretation to an end. We can then say that the *interpretation* of a sign has given way to its *auto-semantic performance*, resulting in understanding and action.[109]

b) Yet these individual differences of the first level must be seen against a shared interpretative background. For in order to form and decode specific messages, to say something new and unprecedented, or to react creatively and constructively to innovative statements, certain *transpersonal* communicational skills are required. In other words, the interpretative activity characterised under a) is enabled and (logically) preceded by the interlocutors' adherence to a common language or sign-system that involves familiarity with its codes and other linguistic rules and conventions. Thus discourse is only possible if the dialogue partners are able to form semantically and syntactically correct sentences. This second level can be interpreted in terms of Abel's interpretation$_2$. Furthermore, on this plane, it is still possible to translate meaningful sentences into another language or sign-system without altering the 'world', even if the creative aspect of the process of translation should not be underestimated. This second level comprises, for instance, different languages, such as German, English or Italian. On the one hand, they are indispensable for the interpretative activity described under a), on the other hand they are less general than that which will be discussed in c).

c) Neither the mastery of a common language nor the absence of disagreement suffices to explain how mutual understanding is possible. Rather, comprehensibility is dependent on other complex factors such as a shared life-form, shared patterns of behaviour, a similar horizon of experience, discursive agreement, etc.[110]

As we have seen, the *horizon* and *practice* of interpretation$_1$ constitutes the most fundamental level of human reality in that they determine what exists, what counts as an object or event, and what not. Each world, with such and such a topography, is always already structured by the principles of individuation and the category-forming concepts of the level of interpretation$_1$. But what kind of ordering structures are built up by this most basic level of interpretation? Abel gives two examples, both of which are re-interpretations of Kantian *principles* from the *transcendental analytic* within the framework of his philosophy of interpretation. In the *analytic of principles* Kant embarks on an analysis of how the link between *concepts* and *intuition* is established in the act of knowledge. The manifold intuitions must be subsumed under general concepts and it is the *apriorische Anschauungsform des inneren Sinns,* namely *time*, that relates

[108] J. Simon, *Zeichenphilosphie und Transzendentalphilosophie*, 73ff.
[109] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 83.
[110] Ibid., 84f.

them to each other. Kant's *principles* lay down under what conditions experience is possible and are the most general rules of 'nature', i.e. the aprioristic presuppositions of all scientific experience. The third *principle* is dedicated to the *analogies of experience* and encompasses a discussion of substance (*permanence of Substance*) and causality (*succession in time*).[111] Abel incorporates these two concepts into his own approach. Due to the schematising and category-forming function of the horizon and praxis of interpretation$_1$, the sense data to which the interpreter is exposed are structured by means of the interpretative schemes substance and causality.[112] In other words, Kant's idealistic basis of the categories is replaced by a *linguistic* foundation. As a result, the notions of substance and causality take on an interpretative and perspectival character and are hence contingent.

B) The relationship between different interpretative perspectives

In this last chapter of the introductory part, I shall address the question of how differing interpretative perspectives or worlds of interpretation are interrelated with each other. Although this is not an essay on political philosophy or theology, the following discussion will touch upon political issues in order to give it a more concrete character.

Abel's reflections on this matter are based on his key ideas of *internal pluralism* and *internal alterity*.[113] Although he does not deny that in principle every interpretation (at least on the level of interpretation$_1$) must be believed to be capable of possessing the "'whole truth'"[114], the pivot around which his political and ethical considerations revolve is the notion of *tolerance*. The philosophy of interpretation allows others to have their other interpretations, but also allows me to have my interpretations as well as my interpretations of the others' interpretations. It thus comes as no surprise that Abel sees affinities between his philosophy of interpretation and liberal democracy.[115] In fact, his philosophical approach is supposed to provide a new intellectual justification for this political theory. Due to the fundamentally interpretative character of reality, Abel sees liberal democracy as the only alternative to *metaphysical foundationalism* (leading to political absolutism, dogmatism, fanaticism or even terror), and *post-modern relativism* (e.g. J.-F. Lyotard).

According to him, metaphysical foundationalism must be rejected since there is no 'god's-eye view' that would allow us to check our interpretations against 'reality itself'. Every sign whose meaning is at issue, is always already located in a network of multiple interpretations and an individual's or a community's specific interpretation of a sign is unintelligible without this polysemic background. The reason for Abel's insistence on the importance of tolerance is thus the conviction that our own specific views and interpretations are inconceivable without an internal relation to other views and interpreta-

[111] I. Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, B 225- 256.
[112] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 51-57.
[113] Ibid., 65f, 243ff.
[114] G. Abel, *Interpretationswelten*, 524.
[115] G. Abel, *Sprach, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 340ff.

tions. That is to say, one single person 'cannot be individual' on his own, since others are always already involved.

Post-modern relativism, on the other hand, fails to see that the end of metaphysical foundationalism does not mean that our speaking, thinking and acting is void of any regularity and order. Even the idea of the 'play', which post-modern thinkers often resort to in order to highlight that our processes of interpretation are free and without external purpose, implies the instantiation of rules. The playing of a game is also based on a practice of interpretation; otherwise it could not be marked off from other modes of discourse such as purpose-orientated or strategic behaviour. Yet the rules of a practice of interpretation are embodied *in* it and are not to be conceived of as something external. It is therefore inappropriate to believe that the only alternative to metaphysical foundationalism is complete arbitrariness, for such a view remains caught in a dualism between foundationalims and relativism. As Abel points out, philosophy of interpretation does not lead to the *end* of reason but simply tries to do justice to the *finite character* of human reason.[116]

It is only liberal democracy that is able to avoid both impasses and which takes into account the finitude of human existence and all our processes of interpretation. As a consequence, the political order and the form of the political system are no longer regarded as an order of *truth* and *knowledge*, but as an order of *beliefs* and *convictions*.[117] Due to the interpretative character of all human speaking, thinking and acting, no finite – and therefore interpretative – mind can possess 'the one metaphysical truth' and/or 'the one, definitive and generally binding explanation', nor can anybody possess a privileged strategy to gain access to such a truth or explanation. This first of all excludes the philosophical sanctioning of any kind of fanaticism. A critical approach must – as regards practice *as well as* theory – emphatically reject the notion of a metaphysically legitimated, definitive and universal authority that forcibly brings the differing interpretative horizon of other people under its own sway. In a spirit of *freedom* and *tolerance*, the diverse interpreters mutually accept their differences, interpretative habits, idiosyncrasies and oppositions, and refrain from a violent subsumption of the other under their own practice of interpretation. An ethics of interpretation is thus an ethics that respects the freedom of the other. Consequently, Abel returns to the fundamental principles of liberal democracy, freedom and equality, which he considers *implications* of his philosophy of interpretation.

Yet it is questionable whether the political system of liberal democracy does necessarily follow from Abel's reflections on the interpretative nature of reality. Rather, his philosophy of interpretation seems at this point to relapse itself into a foundationalism. It is, paradoxically, the 'normativity' of his very ideal of tolerance that proves too restrictive.

Abel seeks to avoid the weaknesses of both metaphysical absolutism and post-modern relativism, but his own reasoning is still based on the very presuppositions he calls into question. In line with Kant, he argues as follows: every universal and material

[116] Ibid., 346f.
[117] Abel discusses the meaning of these terms in ibid., 304ff.

truth-claim implies a metaphysical position; metaphysical positions have become philosophically implausible; hence there can be no claim to truth that is universal as well as material.[118] Yet he does not consider the possibility of material truth-claims that are universal but *not* based on a metaphysical position. Abel fails to question the idea that universality coupled with materiality *necessitates* metaphysics and therefore problematically universalises the non-universalisability of material truth-claims. For this reason, the *negative* conclusions he draws are still based on the view that universality and metaphysics are inextricably linked up.

Since there is never conclusive philosophical evidence to be part of this rather than another interpretative community, Abel argues, we must allow for a radical, internal pluralism. Yet, as he explicitly points out, this does not lead to arbitrariness in the sense that we have no criteria to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' interpretations. For, first, the various worlds of interpretation all have their own specific *logos*, and secondly, every sign whose meaning is at issue is always already located in a complex network of different, but interrelated worlds of interpretation. As a result, the range of possible meanings of a sign is limited by the rules of transformation which structure these worlds – even if these rules elude exhaustive description and objectifications and only become manifest in and through the interpretative practice itself. In other words, there must always be a horizon and practice of interpretation within which a particular interpretation of a sign makes sense. Yet, since there are no philosophical criteria (understood in a foundationlist sense) to decide which of the various interpretative practices is preferable, he resorts to a kind of *super-grammar*.[119] This super-grammar is not a set of rules that *transcends* the particular and conflicting grammars of the various worlds of interpretation. Rather, he seeks to integrate these various grammars in their totality into a complex and comprehensive network so that *x* can now be interpreted as *a* or *b* or *c* or *d*, etc., without contradiction, provided each of these interpretations 'fits into' a corresponding interpretative horizon and practice, i.e. provided it leads to *understanding*.

What Abel does not consider is the *universalisation of a particular perspective* in a non-foundationalist way, which constitutes a fourth option besides metaphysical absolutism, post-modern relativism and liberalism. Abel's perspectivism rightly criticises the notion of a common, material order which is based on 'pure reason'. But it is not possible to infer from this that a perspective which is *philosophically* speaking one among others cannot be universalised. Rather, the critical aspect of Abel's philosophy of interpretation needs to be taken further than he does himself. An approach to reality on the basis of 'pure reason' must be considered *less* restrictive than on his account. Thus Abel's attempt at universalising the non-universalisability of material truth-claims already goes too far. The fact that every sign has a wide range of meanings because it is part of a complex network of different, but interrelated worlds of interpretation, and the insight that the resulting plurality is the precondition for signification and processes of interpretation (under finite conditions) does not mean that *all* of these possible interpre-

[118] I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 82ff.
[119] Abel himself does not use the term 'super-grammar'.

tations must exist *all* the time. Nor is the disappearance of certain interpretative options necessarily due to coercion.

Any prolegomena to Christian political theology must take into account the following insights: (i) Christian faith is an all-comprehensive perspective on the world and there is no realm that can be thought of without reference to divine presence. Accordingly, it is not possible not to reflect on political questions. (ii) This is not to say that there is *one* political system which Christian faith must adhere to throughout the centuries and under all socio-cultural conditions. There is always an eschatological reserve which makes it impossible to view a specific order as the Christian model par excellence. Yet this should neither hinder Christians from commenting on individual political events and decisions nor to reflect on political theory. (iii) Nobody can be forced to believe in the Christian God. This leads to the perennial theological question as to whether 'Constantinianism', the notion of a Christian empire or state is a contradiction in terms. As has been argued, even in a situation in which the majority of people are Christians, it is not legitimate to impose a Christian way of life on the minority.

It follows from this that Christian faith aims at a *non-coercive universalisation of its perspective on the world*. Accordingly, Christian cultural work such as the development of a political theory is always an *invitation* to reconsider and question the prevailing order. In other words, even if it does not aim at the conversion of individuals, it is a kind of *mission*. As regards liberalism, Christian faith tries to entice people to freely relinquish the absolutisation of human freedom.

Part II: Divine speech in Karl Barth: the 'literal understanding'

In line with the reformers of the sixteenth century, but in a completely different intellectual climate, Barth puts the *Word of God*, which he interprets as *Dei loquentis persona*, at the centre of his theology (*KD* I/1, 141). In the *Prolegomena* to the *Church Dogmatics*, he develops his well-known doctrine of the threefold form of the Word of God, distinguishing between the *revealed*, the *written* and the *preached* word, which form an indivisible unity (*KD* I/1, 89ff). First, on the level of the preached word, the fallible human words of the ecclesiastical proclamation become, mediated by the authoritative vicariate of Christ, God's own speech (*KD* I/1, 95, 97). Speech is thereby to be understood as *address,* and is directed at particular human beings in order to evoke faith. Secondly, the written word, Scripture, even if the indispensable *basis* for all proclamation, cannot be equated with God's revelation in the past. Rather, it is the "concrete means by which the Church recollects God's past revelation, is called to expectation of his future revelation, and is thus summoned and guided to proclamation and empowered by it" (*KD* I/1, 114). Scripture thus *becomes* the Word of God, in that God addresses a human being in the context of proclamation. Accordingly, the unity between Scripture and revelation is to be thought of in terms of an *event* (*KD* I/1, 116). Finally, unlike Scripture and proclamation, which only become the Word of God by virtue of a divine (re)actualisation, in Jesus Christ, God has spoken (*Deus dixit*) *once and for all* and we can only look *back* to this past event of revelation.

In what follows the focus will be primarily on the last link of this chain, preaching, the oral proclamation of the Church. As regards the question of authority, there are various ways of interpreting Barth's account of divine speech. On the one hand, Barth seems to understand divine speech 'literally', when he writes:

> … [W]e have no reason not to take the concept of 'God's Word' primarily in its literal sense. 'God's Word' means: God speaks. 'Speaking' is not a symbol. It is not a designation and description which on the basis of his own assessment of its symbolic force man has chosen for something very different from and quite alien to this expression […] We might will be of the opinion that it would have been finer and better if God had not spoken and did not speak with such 'intellectualism', and that it would be more appropriate to God if 'God's word' meant all kinds of other things apart from the fact that 'God speaks'. But is this private opinion of ours so important, resting as it does on a philosophy? (*KD* I/1, 137)

In accordance with this 'literal' understanding, he emphasises that divine speech is always *concrete*. God's word possesses a *purposive character*, which he calls its *pertinence* and *relatedness*. Divine speech is thus always *address* (*KD* I/1, 144). Barth writes:

> … [W]herever and whenever God speaks to man its content [i.e. the content of God's Word] is a *concretissimum*. God always has something specific to say to each man, something that applies alone to him and to him alone (*KD* I/1, 145).

And reflecting on the ethical implications of his Word of God theology, Barth writes about the divine commands:[1]

> Nothing can be made of these commands if we try to generalise and transform them into universally valid principles […] Their content is purely concrete and related to this or that particular man in this or that particular situation (*KD* II/2, 750, cf. 741).

Barth further points out that although God's Word transcends the usual dualism between idealism and realism, its *spirituality* is of particular importance (*KD* I/1, 138ff). To put this semiotically, Barth wants to place the stress on the (immaterial) *meaning* conveyed by the speech-act, even if he does not deny that this meaning can only be communicated by a (material) *sign-vehicle*. As is well-known, a large part of the *Prolegomena* is dedicated to precisely this question: how can the "'infinite qualitative difference' of time and eternity" (*Röm* II, XX) be bridged in the act of revelation (*KD* I/1, 168ff)?[2]

To be sure, Barth's account of divine speech allows for a wide variety of different interpretations. That is to say, it would be interesting to relate his reflections on God's Word to the various modes of speech analysed by linguists and philosophers. Yet a comprehensive investigation that tries to cover the most important types of speech is not possible within the scope of this essay. Hence only *one* mode of speech will be considered, which is particularly interesting as regards the question of authority.

a) I shall first try to show what is meant by the term 'literal understanding' or 'concrete act of interpretation'. The inverted commas are a reminder that these terms are not to be understood in the sense of a metaphysical theory of meaning: 'literal' does not mean that there is a one-to-one correlation between the sign and that which it stands for. Such a view implies the implausible notion of an external standpoint from which the correspondence between signifier and signified can be 'observed'. Rather, recalling the first chapter of this essay, I take 'literal speech' or 'concrete act of interpretation' to be that type of speech which *terminates the chain of interpretation on the synchronic level* – even if the *diachronic* dimension must be taken into account as well.

In Simon, as we have seen, the synchronic termination of the chain of signs is not necessarily tied to speech and verbal communication. After all, he develops a philosophy of the *sign* – which comprises linguistic as well as non-linguistic phenomena. Nor does he say that there is always a *sender* who provides an *addressee* with the 'fitting' sign, i.e. the sign that is needed in order to bring the chain of interpretants to an end. But it cannot be denied that it often *is* another person who helps us find the missing link which leads to comprehension. This is the case, for instance, in a dialogue between teacher and pupil. Yet it is worth noticing that ecclesiastical proclamation, as conceived by Barth, does *not* have a dialogical character in the above sense. I later shall come back to this issue.

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[1] Cf. S. Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 136-157.

[2] Barth further reflects on divine speech as the *act* of God (*KD* I/1, 148ff) and as the *mystery* of God (*KD* I/1, 168ff). However, I will not give a comprehensive account of this analysis here, since the relevant passages will be discussed in the following chapters.

It follows from this that my definition of 'literal speech' constitutes to a certain extent a *sub-category* of that which Simon calls the termination of the chain of interpretation. In Abel's terminology, these phenomena fall into the category of interpretation$_3$ – although the level of interpretation$_3$ can strictly speaking never be separated from the levels of interpretation$_{1+2}$. Rather, as pointed out in the first part, the latter levels remain often hidden, insofar as an act of interpretation$_3$ may be immediately understandable so that no further clarifications are needed. On the level of interpretation$_3$, *knowledge$_3$* is to be interpreted in the narrow, propositional sense: "A knows that p".[3] For instance, "Peter knows that uncle Paul is in Munich this week".[4] Equally, *action$_3$* must be interpreted in the narrow, consciously chosen, intentional and purposive sense. For instance, "Peter buys a bottle of red wine".[5] A further example illustrates the interconnection between knowledge$_3$ and action$_3$: "Peter knows that the proof ABC is correct. Peter carries out the corresponding operation" (knowledge$_3$ + action$_3$).[6]

However, it has been argued by some scholars that it is exactly this 'literal' understanding of speech that *cannot* be found in the *Prolegomena*. Nicholas Wolterstorff writes about Barth's understanding of divine speech: "That which God said in Jesus Christ and is presented to me by Scripture and contemporary proclamation – that must be made "to grab me". God must so act on me that I am "grabbed" by the content of what God has already said. I see no reason to call this action "speech"".[7] A similar view is held by Bernhard Rothen: "Vom „Reden Gottes" scheint Barth nur zu sprechen, weil im göttlichen Tun eine Anrede und Aussage enthalten ist, weil Gottes Handeln einen Sinn und eine Adresse hat. An ein Sprechen im menschlichen Sinn zu denken sollte man sich aber dadurch nicht verleiten lassen".[8]

I am *not* trying to show in this essay that these commentators are wrong. There are certainly many statements in the *Prolegomena* and Barth's earlier and later work that cannot be interpreted in terms of the 'literal understanding' outlined above, and which clearly point in the direction of an alternative notion of 'speech'. I shall turn to this issue in part III. However, I think it wiser not to exclude the 'literal understanding' too quickly, in spite of the theological and philosophical problems that such an interpretation may entail. Rather, I would insist that the passages from the *Church Dogmatics* quoted above (and many others), render a 'literal reading' at least *possible*.

Moreover, even if the 'literal reading' is not compatible with Barth's notion of divine speech, this mode of communication nonetheless remains extremely relevant to the question of authority. This is the main reason why this 'thought-experiment' is carried out and also accounts for the fact why the following reflections go far beyond the scope of what is normally considered ecclesiastical practice. Indeed, as I shall try

[3] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 329.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 332. The relationship between interpretation and knowledge and action is discussed in ibid., 299-339.
[7] N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 72.
[8] B. Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift*, 139.

to show, it is not plausible to regard this type of speech as representative of *Church proclamation*. Rather, the Christian acts of interpretation$_3$ can be informed by a Christian practice of interpretation$_{1+2}$ – even if they fall *outside* the boundary of Church practice in the narrow sense. As far as the structure of this essay is concerned, a definition of what is meant by 'literal speech', as well as reflections on the relationship between speech and authority are followed by a more exegetically orientated investigation into the *Prolegomena*.

b) I shall tackle the more immediately theological question of how 'fallible' human speech is related to 'infallible' divine speech: an issue which is for obvious reasons of utmost importance to the question of authority.[9] For as we have seen, in Barth, divine speech is always *based on* and *mediated by* human speech. In accordance with his dialectical approach, Barth at times places the stress on the *difference*, and at other times on the *correspondence* between divine and human speech. I shall discuss these two variants in chapter 2 and 3 respectively. First, however, at least some aspects of the relationship between speech and authority need to be explored. The starting point of this examination is J. L. Austin's speech-act theory.

[9] Here too, the inverted commas indicate that it is far from clear what these terms actually mean. That is to say, divine 'infallibility' and human 'fallibility' need to be reinterpreted within the framework of a philosophy of interpretation.

1 Speech and authority

A) J.L. Austin's speech-act theory

It was the work of 'ordinary language philosophers' such as Austin, Strawson, Grice and the later Wittgenstein that gave rise to the development of *pragmatics* in twentieth century analytic philosophy. Speech-act theory is a sub-discipline of pragmatics which seeks to highlight the non-propositional aspects of communication. In the eighth chapter of his *William James Lectures* of 1955, J.L. Austin famously analysed speech-acts into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Whereas the locutionary act consists in saying *something*, the illocutionary act encompasses communicational aspects such as the *issuing* of orders, the *asking* of questions or the *making* of promises etc. and the perlocutionary act *causes* something to happen *by* saying something. In other words, the locutionary act has a *meaning* (comprising sense and reference), the illocutionary act a *force*, and the perlocutionary act achieves certain *effects*.[10] Whereas propositions are either true or false, illocutionary acts are either 'happy' or 'unhappy', i.e. they need to meet certain *felicity conditions* in order to be successful. These felicity conditions Austin formulated in the second lecture. At this early stage of his lecture series, however, Austin was still working with the opposition of constative vs. performative utterances, or simply 'constatives' vs. 'performatives', which does not fully correspond to his later distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. I shall come back to this issue in a moment. For a performative utterance to be 'happy', the following criteria need to be met:[11]

(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

Obviously, the conditions A.1/2 and B.1/2 concern the 'external' course of the procedure whereas Γ. 1/2 are criteria for the 'internal' attitude of the speaker towards his utterance. Transgression of the former rules leads to *misfire*, i.e. the act is *purported but void*, and disregard of the second conditions results in an *abuse*, i.e. the act is *pro-*

[10] J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, 94ff.
[11] Ibid., 14ff.

fessed but hollow.[12] As already mentioned, the above felicity conditions originally applied to what Austin called *performative* utterances, which he tried to distinguish from *constative* utterances. Constatives describe, report and constate; they are either true or false. In performative utterances, by contrast, "the uttering of a sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which […] would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something".[13] Initially, Austin sought to isolate performatives because he was convinced that utterances were *either* performatives *or* constatives, and did not allow for the idea that every utterance could encompass *both* aspects.[14] First, he was looking for grammatical criteria to distinguish between these two categories, then turned to vocabulary, and finally suggested a combination of both factors.[15] Yet these attempts failed as he realised that the very same sentence can be used as a performative *or* a constative utterance, depending on the *context*, and concluded that no rules can be established if we leave utterances as they stand. He thus proposed filtering out performatives by testing whether an utterance could be *reduced* to what he called *explicit performatives* – which are always in 'first person indicative present'. But this second attempt failed too, and he did not manage to put together a list of performative verbs, as he had intended to do.[16] A fresh start was required that finally led him to analyse every speech act into three *sub*-acts, i.e. a locutionary, an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act.

B) Archetypical performatives

Yet there is a certain ambiguity in Austin's understanding of performatives which is relevant to the question of authority.[17] The above account of the felicity conditions of performatives reveals that they should not primarily (or exclusively) be viewed as oral or linguistic phenomena. Rather, they constitute the rules of a *conventional* procedure, which generates *conventional* effects. In other words, language only plays a role in these procedures insofar as it comes to *an actualisation of a standardised text that is part of a recognised ritual in which a person with an officially recognised function performs under highly specific circumstances certain acts with pre-fixed and foreseeable consequences*.[18] Indeed, Austin himself states that in "very many cases it is possible to perform a[n] [performative] act of exactly the same kind *not* by uttering words, whether written or spoken, but in some other way".[19]

[12] Ibid., ch. III & IV.
[13] Ibid., 5.
[14] In fact, Austin, using his later terminology, more cautiously writes: "To perform a locutionary act is *in general*, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary* act, as I propose to call it", ibid., 98, first italics mine). As regards the relationship between the different terminologies used before and after the eights lecture, Austin writes: "The doctrine of the performative/constative distinction stands to the doctrine of locutionary and illocutionary acts in the total speech-act as the *special* theory to the *general* theory", ibid., 148.
[15] Ibid., ch. V.
[16] Ibid., ch. VI & VII.
[17] I am following I.U. Dalferth, *Religiöse Rede von Gott*, 182-196.
[18] Ibid., 186.
[19] J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, 8, cf. 25.

If the stress is placed on this non-linguistic aspect of Austin's performatives, one moves in the direction of what Furberg calls *archetypical performatives.*[20] Good examples of archetypical performatives are *liturgical formulas.* In a wedding service, for instance, a standardised text is recited each time in exactly the same way, apart from a few slots where the names of the bride and the bridegroom are inserted. The following example is taken from the Eastern Orthodox betrothal service which constitutes the canonical marriage contract:[21]

Then taking the rings, the priest blesses the bridal pair, making the sign of the cross with the ring of the bride over the bridegroom, and with that of the bridegroom over the bride, saying to the man: The servant of God, —— , is betrothed to the handmaiden of God, —— , in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And to the woman: The handmaiden of God, —— , is betrothed to the servant of God, —— , in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now as far as archetypical performatives are concerned, the conditions A.1/2 and B.1/2 are either *fully* met or *not* met *at all* (*tertium non datur*), whereas the rules Γ.1/2 do not apply. Austin explicitly says that not "*every* ritual is liable to every form of infelicity …".[22] For on this institutional level, the personal attitude of the speaker (in the above example the priest) towards his utterance – be it emotional or intellectual – is of no concern (Γ.1). The couple is married even if the priest does not approve of their decision. Similarly, his conduct after the wedding ceremony cannot undo the conjugal bond between the bridal pair in any way (Γ.2). As Furman puts it: "Their performer shoulders no obligations for the future. He has as it were pressed a button in a social machine. Thenceforward the machine works without his interference – or if it does not work, it is not necessarily his business to put it aright".[23] I here deliberately disregard the possible pastoral function the priest may very well exercise *after* the ceremony. Thus for the marriage to be canonically binding it suffices that:

– there is an ecclesiastically recognised canonical betrothal/wedding service leading to betrothal/marriage by virtue of certain words spoken to the bridal pair (A.1).[24]

– the recital of the liturgy is part of a proper Church service, the pair meets the canonical requirements for wedding candidates and the priest is really an ordained priest (A.2)

– the betrothal/wedding service is performed correctly (B.1) and completely (B.2)

Against the background of such conventional procedures, Austin's attempt to articulate strict felicity conditions according to which it can be decided whether or not a

[20] I.U. Dalferth, *Religiöse Rede von Gott*, 184, 187, drawing on M. Furberg, *Saying and Meaning*.
[21] J. Meyendorff, *Marriage*, 115, cf. 33.
[22] J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, 19.
[23] M. Furberg, *Saying and Meaning*, 280.
[24] According to Furberg, archetypical perfomatives only have a 'grammatical' but not a 'real' addressee: "Think of the 'addressee's' role in the naming of a ship or the baptism of an infant! The performative is, so to speak, directed to the society at large". Yet wedding services also rank among his examples and to a certain degree *are* directed to the 'society at large', ibid., 281.

performative utterance has been 'happy' makes perfectly sense. However, the problem is that Austin did not focus exclusively upon cases of conventional and institutionalised re-actualisations of standardised texts, but shifted in the course of his lectures to 'proper' ordinary language philosophy. Already in the chapter on 'abuses', which discusses the conditions Γ.1/2, Austin had to examine different examples, since – as already mentioned – archetypical performatives hardly meet the criteria Γ.1/2. He thus turned to utterances such as 'I promise', 'I apologise' etc., which are 'proper' speech-acts in the sense that they can be analysed into (what he from chapter eight onwards called) locutionary and illocutionary acts. In other words, these latter examples are *genuinely linguistic* utterances and no longer archetypical performatives.

When his programme to draw a clear boundary between constatives and performatives proved unrealisable, he replaced the opposition performative/constative by the distinction between the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary act within *every* utterance. More precisely, what he had earlier called performative was now regarded as the illocutionary act (besides the locutionary and the perlocutionary act), i.e. as a *sub*-act of a comprehensive speech-act: "The total speech-act in the total speech-situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating".[25] This major modification had far-reaching consequences insofar as the illocutionary act did no longer cover archetypical performatives such as lawsuits, absolutions and so forth.

C) Tautegoric speech

Moreover, as Dalferth points out, there is a third mode of speech which was originally implied by Austin's understanding of performatives but then got lost due to his 'fresh start': *causative speech*. Whereas illocutionary force is an aspect of all utterances and pertains to non-normative communication, causativity more specifically concerns speech that is *reality- and norm-constitutive*, i.e. which institutes new rules on the basis of old ones and introduces new state of affairs. Compared to archetypical performatives, causative speech is more genuinely *innovative* insofar as it does not just establish non-normative state of affairs by instigating pre-existing proceedings but also institutes *new* norms on the basis of old ones.[26] In other words, causative speech neither has a merely descriptive function in the sense that it only says what *is* (already) the case, nor does it simply express what *should* be the case. Rather, what it says is the case *because of* and *through* what it says.[27] Yet the newly instituted social facts are necessarily based on preceding norms insofar as the person who initiates them must exercise an officially recognised authority. That is to say, the new state of affairs derives from an already existing norm or set of norms. For this reason, even if causative speech itself is a linguistic phenomenon, it is to a high degree dependent

[25] J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, 148.
[26] I.U. Dalferth, *Religiöse Rede von Gott*, 192f.
[27] Ibid., 424. Dalferth's discussion of causative speech falls into two sections, ibid., 182-197, 204-207 *and* 424-427. The first part gives an account of causative *speech* and the second one of causative *address*. In spite of this slight shift of emphasis I take speech and address to be synonyms here.

upon a non-linguistic background. This background consists of what Searle calls *institutional facts*, which he defines as follows: "They are indeed facts; but their existence, unlike the existence of brute facts, presupposes the existence of certain human institutions […] These "institutions" are systems of constitutive rules. Every institutional fact is underlain by a (system of) rule(s) of the form "*X* counts as *Y* in context *C*"".[28] But since causative speech *institutes* such facts, one could also say that they *effect* that X is Y in the context C.[29]

Dalferth further differentiates within the category of causative speech between *tautegoric*, *authorising* and *legislating* speech (or address). The first type ascribes to *X* a new *reality*, the second one a new *ability* and the third one a new *obligation*. In what follows I shall confine myself to the first sub-class: *tautegoric speech*. In tautegoric speech, the sender sets a new reality insofar as *X* henceforth counts *as Y* whereas *X* can be an object/event, a predicator or a proposition. In the case of objects and events, tautegoric speech assigns to them a new quality, for instance by naming or classifying them so that they can be integrated into a semiotic system. As regards human beings, tautegoric speech can take on the form of a *self-introduction* (e.g. 'I am *Y*') or a *proclamation* ('you are *Y*'). The same holds for predicators or propositions. Either a particular behaviour is approved or disapproved of by means of a predicator, such as in the case of a washing that takes on a propitiatory meaning, or a set of propositions is instituted as a binding law.[30]

A good example of causative speech is the forensic judgement. For instance, the judge announces at the end of the court session: "You are sentenced to life imprisonment". If one views causative speech against the background of the above felicity conditions, one could again say that – as in the case of archetypical performatives – A.1/2 and B.1/2 must be either *fully* met or *not* met *at all* (*tertium non datur*), whereas the rules Γ.1/2 do not apply. The convict is sent to Siberia even if the judge knows that he is innocent but nonetheless sentences him to life imprisonment – e.g. because he poses a potential threat to his own marriage plans (Γ.2). Similarly, the conduct of the judge after he has passed judgment on the case does not affect the fate of the prisoner – unless somebody lodges an appeal against the severity of the sentence, leading to a reconsideration of the case (Γ.2). Thus for the verdict delivered by the jury and the judgment pronounced by the justice to be legally binding it suffices that:

– there is an institution which is officially recognized by a trans-national community, a nation state, a county or a province, as a law court dealing with judicial matters (A.1)

– the people involved in the case were legally elected representatives of the state or county and the session did take place in an official law court (A.2)

– the court procedures leading to this sentence were lawfully (B.1) and completely carried out (B.2)

[28] J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, 51f. Dalferth draws on Searle's understanding of *institutional facts*.
[29] Cf. I.U. Dalferth, *Religiöse Rede von Gott*, 424.
[30] Ibid., 424-427.

D) Two types of authority

It should have become clear by now that the difference between archetypical performatives and causative/tautegorical speech is very subtle indeed. For instance, forensic judgements are, according to Dalferth, representative of *tautegoric speech*,[31] but at the same time figure in Furman's list of examples of *archetypical performatives*. Nonetheless, the above definitions make the difference between these two types of speech very clear. In what follows, I shall attempt to briefly delineate two different types of competence and authority which these two modes of speech correspond to.

a) In the case of *archetypical performatives*, the carrying out of the ritual *itself*, i.e. the actualisation of a standardised text, does not require any special skills. In principle, everybody who is able to recite the text and to re-produce the prescribed sound-patterns could carry out the ritual. But, first, not everybody has the authority, i.e. is *entitled* to perform it, and secondly, the person conducting the ritual very often has other responsibilities which may well require additional expertise. Thus the performance of the ritual must be seen in the light of this wider field of activities. However, leaving this latter aspect aside, the type of authority corresponding to archetypical performatives is that of *institutional authority*.

b) By contrast, *tautegoric speech*, such as the passing of a forensic judgement, is definitely an act that can only be performed by an expert. The judge has to know the law, needs to be informed about the verdict of the jury and the crime allegedly committed by the accused, and must skilfully relate these pieces of information in order to pronounce the final judgement. But as we have seen, the performance of a tautegoric speech-act is restricted to people who have been officially authorised to do so. That is to say, authorisation and *not* expertise is the decisive factor in determining whether a tautegoric utterance is acceptable or not. However, for the purpose of this essay, I shall place the stress rather on the latter aspect: the *expertise* or *competence* that is required to perform a tautegoric speech-act – although this does not exclude the possibility that the interpreter holds a publicly recognised office. After all, there is no contradiction between possessing competence and being an officially acknowledge authority. Furthermore, as we have seen above, tautegoric speech is genuinely *innovative* and does not just repeat standardised procedures – even if it is dependent on institutional facts. This makes it abundantly clear that not just expert knowledge but also a high degree of *creativity* is required to perform tautegoric speech-acts. This type of authority I shall call *expert authority*.

The following considerations are related to this second type of authority: expert authority. That is to say, there is a connection between expert authority and 'literal speech' or 'concrete acts of interpretation'. Now in the first half of part II, the focus will be on speech, rather than authority. Only towards the end of part II, the question of authority will be resumed.

[31] Ibid., 204ff.

E) Definition of ‘literal speech’ and ‘concrete act of interpretation’

I am now in a position to define what is meant by ‘literal speech’ or a ‘concrete act of interpretation’. The following formula may illustrate its basic structure:

s (= sender) interprets (or sets) x as y to a (= addressee) in the context c

Evidently, this formula and the stress on competence rather than authority clearly deviate from the original definition of tautegoric speech. Further modifications will follow in this chapter. Hence I shall no longer call it tautegoric speech. Nonetheless, in order to follow the argument of this essay, it is important to keep in mind that (my definition of) ‘literal speech’ and tautegoric speech are closely related to each other. Recalling what was set out in the first part, we can now say that the chain of signifiers comes to an end on the synchronic level in that *s interprets x as y to a in the context c*. This is the basic formula on the basis of which Barth’s understanding of divine speech will now be analysed. In chapter two, the focus will be on those passages in which Barth places the stress on the *difference* between divine and human speech.

2 The 'voluntaristic approach': emphasising the difference between divine and human speech

Emphasising the difference between divine and human speech, Barth points out that God says or is able to say something *completely different* than the preacher – even if, once again, divine speech *remains* mediated by human speech and is always based on Scripture. "What God said and what God will say is always quite different from what we can and must say to ourselves and others about its content" [i.e. the content of the Word of God] (*KD* I/1, 145). Human proclamation as such, the delivery of the sermon, cannot be equated with the *concrete fullness of the Word of God*, but is only a *pointer* to that fullness (ibid). Due to the fall, human existence constantly undergoes a divine judgment which divorces profanity from holiness, sin from grace and obedience from disobedience. This divorce also applies to human speech, but cannot be equated with the difference between 'worldly' and 'religious' talk, which is still a differentiation *within* the profane realm: "Neither the *object* nor the *intention* makes human speech sanctified talk about God, just as conversely it does not have to be secular because it does not have this *object* or *intention*" (*KD* I/1, 48, emphases mine). The differentiation between 'worldly' and 'religious' talk is, as every human attempt to distinguish between faith and non-belief, a necessary but at the same time highly ambiguous symptom of the real and definitive divorce between profanity and holiness. Nonetheless, it is a *necessar*y symptom: "The constantly consummated event of the final divorce, of the event in which God is the actor, casts its shadow before in the event of this preliminary divorce in which man acts" (*KD* I/1, 48).[32]

A) A diachronic-pneumatological or an actualistic-theocentric eschatology?

There is an obvious tension in this last quotation between what could be called a *diachronic-pneumatological* and an *actualistic-theocentric* eschatology, which is characteristic of Barth's whole dialectical theology. For even if Barth uses temporal adverbs, what is actually at stake here, is *not* the temporal sequence of events but the relationship between divine and human action, and the *eschatological qualification* of the latter by the former. On the one hand, there is the realm of *divine* action: God brings about a *final divorce* between the profane and the holy. Yet this final divorce is not something that will take place 'at a later point in time', or 'at the end of time' (whatever that would mean), but is rather a *continual* event *in* time. Now if this definitive *divine* divorce is something that occurs within the spatio-temporal realm, how is it related to the preliminary *human* divorce between 'worldly' and 'religious', which Barth calls a necessary but ambiguous symptom of the divine separation?

[32] The German texts reads: "Das immer wieder sich vollziehende Ereignis jener endgültigen Scheidung, jenes Ereignis, in dem Gott der Handelnde ist, wirf in dem Ereignis dieser vorläufigen Scheidung, in welchem der Mensch handelt, seinen Schatten voraus" (*KD* I/1, 48).

Barth says that the definitive divine judgement casts its shadow before *in* the preliminary human divorce. Yet this expression still allows for various readings since it remains unclear *in what way* the human divorce can be regarded as a pointer to the divine divorce. The following statement only increases the confusion as regards the relationship between divine and human action: "Jenes Ereignis, in welchem *Gott* handelt, besteht nämlich *ebenfalls durchaus* darin, dass Menschen von Gott *sichtbar* zum Sein in der sichtbaren Kirche erweckt, ausgesondert und versammelt werden" (*KD* I/1, 49, emphases mine).[33]

The question that needs to be answered is whether there is a *contrast* between the divine and the human divorce between 'worldly' and 'religious' (both of which are visual in the spatio-temporal realm), or whether these two divorces *coincide* (phenomenologically). Both answers raise further questions which are related to the issue of divine and human agency. If the former is the case, how can the *divine* divorce – which 'also' has a 'visual' character – be thought of without human involvement and without reducing God to an ontic agent among others? If the latter is the case, how are we to conceive the relationship between divine and human action? More concretely, to what extent has the divine divorce *criteriological priority* over the human separation? Barth continues:[34]

> A visible opposition between religious and worldly, arising within the profane realm, is now *confirmed* (*bestätigt*) and *preserved* (*bewährt*), *not of itself* but in this event of divine election, and is thereby *marked out* (*ausgezeichnet*) as a genuine indication of the opposition between judgment and grace, in which it is not a case of this man or that acting against others, but of God acting on men (*KD* I/1, 49, emphases mine).

This statement clearly points in the direction of the second option mentioned above, i.e. the human and the divine divorce seem to coincide. But the crucial question is what this divine *confirmation* (*Bestätigung*) of the inner-worldly human divorce between 'worldly' and 'religious' is supposed to mean. Does it mean that the human divorce is perfectly appropriate as it stands and is only *sanctioned* or *authorised* by God? But if that is so, what does this divine authorisation consist in? Moreover, one has to keep in mind that the divinely authorised human divorce between judgment and grace is still only a *pointer to* the *real* contrast between judgement and grace *in which God alone acts*.

Before I shall make an attempt to answer these questions, let us return to the issue of worldly and religious speech which was the starting point of these reflections. Barth concludes: "In the same sense there is human talk distinguished genuinely and concretely from other human talk as talk about God; certainly not in and for itself, but in virtue of divine confirmation and preservation – divine confirmation and preservation *of what genuinely and concretely distinguishes it from other human talk*" (*KD* I/1, 49, italics mine).

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[33] For exegetical reasons it seems wiser not to translate this complex sentence.

[34] The German text reads: "Ein innerhalb des profanen Bereichs aufspringender sichtbarer Gegensatz von „religiös" und „weltlich" ist jetzt, nicht an sich, aber in diesem Ereignis göttlicher Erwählung bestätigt and bewährt und damit ausgezeichnet als echter Hinweis auf den Gegensatz von Gericht und Gnade, in welchem nicht dieser und dieser Mensch anderen gegenüber, wohl aber Gott an den Menschen handelt" (*KD* I/1, 49).

It follows from this that human religious talk within the profane realm is the *necessary but not sufficient condition* for divine speech to occur. As Barth himself puts it, human religious talk is *necessary* but *ambiguous* (*KD* I/1, 48). This leads us back to the question of how we are to conceive of what Barth calls the divine confirmation of religious talk (occurring within the profane realm). Obviously, this confirmation is supposed to *disambiguate* the necessary, but ambiguous human talk; but in what way? And, as Barth makes entirely clear, it is a confirmation of a type of speech that is already distinct from other human speech without this divine confirmation. Thus I shall try to answer the following questions: a) what marks religious speech off from worldly speech and b) what does divine confirmation mean?

B) Religious speech and worldly speech

According to Barth, religious speech is Church *proclamation*: "i.e. the attempt, essayed by one called thereto in the Church, to express in his own words in the form of an exposition of a portion of the Biblical testimony to revelation, and to make comprehensible to men of his day, the promise of God's revelation, reconciliation and calling, as they are to be expected here and now" (*KD* I/1, 56). That is to say, what marks religious speech off from worldly speech is: the *speaker* (he must be called), the *context* (Church service), the *content* (Gospel narratives, Jesus Christ) and the *way this content is talked about* (proclamation aiming to evoke faith).

Yet the fact that religious talk *as such* still belongs exclusively to the profane realm, even if it meets all the above criteria, reveals a problematic dualism in Barth's theology. God's action is something *additional* and *external* to human speech. A genuinely incarnational and Trinitarian theology, however, would conceive of God as *internally related* to human processes of signification. What mediates between the postlapsarian, 'profane' and the redeemed or 'religious' practice of interpretation is a *diachronic transformation* and not a series of punctual events. The reality of God must be thought of as a *negative or limit concept* (see I, 1) that keeps our interpretative processes and actions going since none of our present convictions and interpretations can be regarded as the final meanings of signs. Similarly, *divine truth* is the (non-foundationalist) belief in the *infinite improvability* of our interpretations and interpretative strategies. The transition from profane to religious speech must therefore be seen as the production of ever better versions of signs, i.e. in terms of a *directed serialisation*. What is unintelligible, however, is the idea that a sign or a string of signs could, by virtue of a mysterious meaning-bestowing act, assume all of a sudden its full and ultimate meaning – for it would then cease to be a sign. It follows from this that if *s* interprets *x* as *y* from a Christian perspective, the difference between 'profane' and 'religious' – not that between God and creation! – is always already 'blurred'. But at the same time, there is room for an infinite progress.

Barth himself talks of the *twofold indirectness* of divine revelation (*KD* I/1, 174). According to him, what separates us from God is, first, our createdness, and secondly, our fallenness. The first difference has been *bridged* by the incarnation, but cannot and must not be overcome. This issue is famously discussed by Barth in terms of the dialectic between God's veiling and unveiling. A Christian understanding of

revelation relies on the mediatory function of creaturely signs and thus transcends the traditional dualism between idealism and realism which Barth relates to the shortcomings of the neo-Protestant and the Catholic tradition respectively (*KD* I/1, 168-194). In other words, the primary sacrament Jesus Christ on the one hand constitutes the *condition of possibility* of human God-talk insofar as the man Jesus of Nazareth is itself a *creaturely* sign-vehicle carrying (a) divine meaning(s). On the other hand, Jesus Christ, or more precisely, the first document that reports about the life of Jesus from a Christian, i.e. post-Easter perspective, the Gospel narratives, is also the condition of possibility of *appropriate* God-talk, since it is itself the first example of *truthful* talk about God.

This second aspect concerns the *meaning* of the signs we generate in our religious speech and not just the fact that we use signs whose sign-vehicles are taken from the creaturely realm. It is on this second level that the boundary between 'profane' and 'religious' is blurred, provided somebody really tries to interpret a particular *x* from the Christian perspective. More precisely, this means that the interpretation of *x* as *y* is a Christian interpretation to exactly the extent to which it really *is* a Christian interpretation. This is of course a truism. But it is supposed to make clear that that there are *degrees* of adequacy. It follows from this that *s's* interpretation of *x* as *y* is not the final interpretation of *x* but must give rise to further acts of interpretation of the kind *x* is y_2 and so forth. Thus divine presence manifests itself in the transition from the interpretation *x* is *y* to *x* is y_2, y_3, y_4 …, all of which remain *human* interpretations, but all of which are informed by the primary and secondary sacrament of the Christian tradition.[35]

C) Divine confirmation

Barth, however, takes a completely different approach. In the above quotations from the *Church Dogmatics*, divine confirmation can be interpreted in two different ways, both of which are equally problematic.

a) Verification

Either this confirmation – which Barth calls an event of divine election – merely confirms the meaning of the signs produced by a human being without *altering* their meaning. This raises the question of how such a confirmation can be analysed semiotically or hermeneutically. If one follows this paradigm, the addressee first knows that *x* is *y* and then, by virtue of the divine confirmation, knows that the sentence *x* is *y is true*. Yet this model does not do justice to Peirce's triadic understanding of the sign and ignores the creative and innovative character of every act of knowledge: "A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign" (*CP* 2.228).

[35] As mentioned in the first chapter, *x* is not an externally or metaphysically given object which we can directly access. Rather, the continuity of the identity of *x* is internally construed, i.e. itself an act of interpretation.

Now if one stresses that the representamen creates an *equivalent* sign in the mind of the addressee, one's focus is on the *personal appropriation* of the representamen. The interpretant is an *equivalent* sign since it stands for the same object as the representamen but replaces the latter in order to make the object semiotically accessible to the addressee (in some respect). One could therefore say that equivalence, the fact that a sign *has the same value* as another one, is a *synchronic-contextual* category. What matters is that the addressee *understands* the sign in his specific context, but not that he understands it *better* than the sender.

If one emphasises that the sign produced in the mind of the addressee is a *more developed sign*, the focus is on the *diachronic-teleological* aspect of sign-production. The interpretant has a higher value than the representamen, insofar as it is a *more adequate representation* of the (dynamical) object. Nonetheless, in both cases, the appropriation of a sign is a creative act leading to an *accumulation* of meanings (and in the latter case even to an *improvement* of meaning).

Barth's understanding of confirmation, however, which I tried to characterise in terms of a transition from 'I know that *x* is *y*' to 'I know that *x* is *y is true*' is a kind of verification. There is no change with regard to content (*x* is *y*) but an *epistemic authentication* brought about by God himself. Yet Barth does not see this shift as the transition from *fides* to *visio*, but rather as the difference between *non-belief* and *faith*. However, the notion of an unreserved divine authorisation of a *fallible* human statement is outright dangerous. Although the interpretation of *x* as *y* may well be informed by the primary/secondary sacrament, it is still a *human* interpretation and therefore fallible. Put differently, it is only *one* interpretation of *x* in a directed serialisation that needs to be infinitely improved. For this reason, God's presence should not be conceived of in terms of a miraculous intervention that externally authorises human utterances. Rather, divine presence is located in the transition from one interpretant to another and leads to an infinite series of interpretations. It thus reveals the inexhaustible semantic depth of every object as well the infinite transformability of the interpreter who mediates between creator and creation.

b) Difference-in-unity

However, in the context of the whole *Prolegomena*, the above interpretation (i.e. confirmation as verification) does hardly do justice to Barth's understanding of revelation. Rather, divine intervention is thought of as an act that *alters* the meaning of the creaturely signs. What is at stake here, is the question of how a sign-vehicle which is part of the semiotic system of a culture can assume a divine meaning (in the act of revelation) in addition to its immanent meanings (*KD* I/2, 243ff, II/1 § 27). This issue concerns all three forms of the Word of God: the *man* Jesus of Nazareth, the Biblical *text* and *human* speech in the act of proclamation. And Barth goes to great pains in the *Prolegomena* to show that the question of how this transformation takes place must be answered in each of these three cases individually (*KD* I/2, §§ 13-15; 19-21; 22-24). In this chapter, however, the discussion will be confined to the issue of how the *phonic signs* produced in the proclamation assume an additional meaning. As already indicated, Barth often emphasises the *difference* between that

which the preacher says and that which God says, although divine speech remains based on and mediated by human speech (*KD* I/1,145). Hence what needs to be explained is how this *difference-in-unity* is to be thought of.

Now in the passages quoted above, religious speech already has a distinct character 'before' the divine intervention (*KD* I/1, 47, cf. I/2, 855). That is to say, the *meanings* of the signs produced by the human preacher are of importance, even if they have to undergo a sort of 'transformation'. But how can this transformation be thought of? Clearly, the difference in meaning that occurs must be analysed in terms of a *receiver/addressee-related pragmatics*. For it would be a very crude anthropomorphism to ascribe to God the generation of sound units – *in addition* to the ones produced by the human proclaimer. Consequently, this 'surplus' of meaning must be related to the *act of reception*.

Approaching this problem from a Trinitarian perspective, I shall elaborate on the above distinction between a *synchronic-contextual* a) and a *diachronic-teleological* b) interpretation.

a) From a pragmatic point of view, it is trivial to say that one and the same speech *can* and always *will* be decoded in many different ways, even if one focuses solely on the synchronic aspect of interpretation. For each of the addressees has to a certain extent a different interpretative horizon even if they are all co-present with the speaker so that they share a common context. The notion of a totally univocal meaning that is identically imposed on all recipients is by no means required for successful and non-arbitrary communication – and apart from that, utterly unintelligible. And although there is nothing specifically theological about this pragmatic insight, it is possible to interpret it within a Trinitarian framework. The sermon composed by the preacher can be regarded as the prolongation of the *Logos* aspect of revelation: certain creaturely signs assume "along with what they are and mean within this world, in themselves, and from the standpoint of immanence […] another nature and meaning from the side of the objective reality of revelation, i.e., from the side of the incarnation or the Word" (*KD* I/2, 243). The *Pneuma* aspect, however, stands for the dissemination of the *Logos*, the multiple receptions of the Word on the part of the addressees. If one argues along these lines, Barth's statement that God can say something completely different than the human preacher would simply amount to emphasising the Pneuma aspect – not necessarily *at the expense* of the Logos aspect. As he writes himself: "[T]he Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and also of the Son. He is not a Spirit beside the Word. He is the Spirit of the Word itself who brings to our ears the Word and nothing but the Word" (*KD* I/2, 261, cf. 258). And the pragmatic function of the Spirit is complete if we recall that when God speaks, he "always has something very specific to say to each man, something that applies alone to him and to him alone" (*KD* I/1, 145). So if we interpret Barth as favourably as possible, we could say that he tries to take into account the *Logos* aspect as well as the *Pneuma* aspect, but simply at times places the stress on the latter rather than the former. I call this interpretation *synchronic-contextual* since differences in meaning occur primarily on the synchronic level and exist due to the different interpretative horizons of the addressees.

b) The *diachronic-teleological* interpretation of the difference-in-unity model, however, accentuates the innovative and teleological aspect of the work of the Spirit. As mentioned above, the reality of God is thought of as a limit concept that keeps our interpretative processes and actions going, since none of our present convictions and interpretations can be regarded as the final meaning of a sign. Accordingly, the transition from profane to religious speech must be understood as the production of ever better versions of signs, i.e. in terms of a directed serialisation. Now if *s* interprets *x* as *y* to *a* in the context *c*, this cannot be the ultimate interpretation of *x* but must give rise to further acts of interpretation of the kind *x* is y_2, y_3 and so forth, all of which remain human interpretations, but all of which are informed by the primary sacrament through the secondary sacrament. Thus the diachronic-teleological interpretation highlights this innovative aspect of the reception of the Word but to a certain extent abstracts from the different interpretative horizons of the addressees. That is to say, difference is primarily thought of in *diachronic* terms, as a series of perspectival but directed interpretations, which lead to an ever deeper understanding of the object of interpretation. It goes without saying that not every reception of an act of interpretation of the kind *s* interprets *x* as *y* to *a* in the context *c* will automatically lead to an increase in knowledge. Nonetheless, it *may* lead – under certain circumstances – to a refined perception of *x* and thus constitute a real progress. Furthermore, it is important to notice that the two different interpretations a) and b) are not mutually exclusive but can be combined.

Yet it is very questionable whether interpretation b) is compatible with the basic structure of Barth's theology as set out in the *Prolegomena*. As is well-known, Barth hardly allows for any continuity as far as the reception of the divine Word is concerned but rather thinks of faith in terms of a series of *individual events*. Even if it cannot be denied that in the event of faith, the believer may well be aware that he believed before and will again believe in the future, this state of believing, which embraces past, present and future, *is not identical with faith*: "… [A]s distinct from it [i.e. faith], it is never something which is there already. It is always a gift which has to be seized again and again …" (*KD* I/2, 791). Yet the diachronic-teleological model sketched above does require a certain *continuity*-in-discontinuity and is therefore scarcely compatible with Barth's understanding of faith.

There is another aspect that clearly separates Barth's understanding of revelation from a diachronic-teleological model. As we have seen above, even if there is a divine election and confirmation of religious speech within the profane realm, this is still only a "genuine indication (*Hinweis*) of the opposition between judgement and grace, *in which it is not a case of this man or that acting against others, but of God acting on men*" (*KD* I/1, 49, italics mine). This statement plays off divine and human agency against each other and amounts to saying that finally, the relationship between human beings and God will no longer be mediated by signs; for human action is inextricably linked up with processes of signification and time.

Let me return to what I called the difference-in-unity model. In the above discussion, particularly in a), it was emphasised that divine election and confirmation concerns a type of human speech that is already marked off as religious speech within

the profane realm. Yet there are other statements in the *Prolegomena* which undermine the balanced Trinitarian approach sketched in a) and reinforce certain voluntaristic tendencies in Barth's thought.

c) Voluntarism

To begin with, let me return to the quotation that served as the starting point for this discussion: "Neither the subject nor the intention makes human speech sanctified talk about God, just as conversely *it does not have to be secular because it does not have this subject or intention*" (*KD* I/1, 48, italics mine). To be sure, taken in isolation, this second part of the sentence can be read in many different ways. For instance, the formula that is supposed to represent what I called 'literal speech', allows for an understanding of religious talk that dispenses to a certain extent with explicitly religious terms such as God, creation, etc. Rather, the Christian dimension of an act of interpretation is hidden in the as-structure of '*s* interprets *x* as *y* to *a* in the context *c*'. In other words, one could read the above quotation in the sense that we do not need to talk *about* God (interpretation$_3$) in order to talk as Christians, for it suffices that our acts of communication are informed by a Christian practice of interpretation$_1$, which may remain 'hidden'. In the context of the *Prolegomena* and its stress on Church proclamation, however, this interpretation is not plausible. Rather, the difference between divine and human speech is envisaged in a different way and points in the direction of a voluntarism.

Before I conclude this chapter, let me sum up the above analyses by distinguishing between *four different degrees of difference* between divine and human speech (the paragraphs c) and d) are based on material that has not been discussed yet and provide further evidence for Barth's voluntaristic tendencies).

a) *Coincidence*: Divine and human speech 'coincide'. This is not to say, of course, that either God becomes man, or man God in the sense of an ontological identity. Rather, speech is taken to be a human phenomenon (and *only* a human phenomenon) that can be *more or less* informed by a Christian understanding of reality.

b) *Relative independence*: There are a number of statements in the *Prolegomena* that emphasise the relative independence of divine from human speech. As Barth points out, formal and material perfection is not required, since even the highest possible perfection would not make human talk proclamation, nor could the least perfection prevent it from being proclamation (*KD* I/1, 53). Such statements seem to suggest that for divine speech to occur, humanly produced speech nonetheless needs to have a distinct character and a certain quality, even if the difference between divine and human speech is emphasised. It is only that formal or material *perfection* is not required, and that even the *least* perfection need not be an insurmountable obstacle for real proclamation to be possible.[36] For this reason, there is no qualitative but only a gradual difference between a) and b); both allow for difference-in-unity.

[36] In fact, Barth introduces another criterion. The whole passage reads: "Verkündigung ist also nicht nach ihrer formellen oder inhaltlichen Vollkommenheit gefragt – höchste Vollkommenheit würde menschliche Rede noch nicht zur Verkündigung machen und geringste könnte sie noch nicht hindern, Verkündigung zu sein – *wohl aber danach, ob sie Dienst ist, ob sie Auftrag habe* (*KD* I/1, 53, cf. 57-

c) *Mild voluntarism*: At times, Barth goes a step further, when he contends that divine speech is not restricted to the proclamation of the Church, even if it is still tied to creaturely signs. What is different in c) compared to a) and b), is that the meaning of the signs by means of which God communicates are more or less insignificant for divine speech to occur. But here too, one has to be careful not to misread Barth. To be sure, he does say that God's Word is not restricted to the Church's proclamation: "He [i.e. God] can establish Church directly and newly, when and wherever he likes", and "God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog" (*KD* I/1, 54f, cf. 60). In principle, this kind of address can be viewed as an interpretation of the world *in the light* of the 'primary sacrament'. The Christian reads the divine presence, mediated by Scripture, 'into' the world. Even experiences such as 'being addressed by God through a dead dog' etc., in which the addressee appears to be only passively involved, can very well fall into this category, for it is not required that the addressee be *aware* of an act of interpretation. Furthermore, the Christian construal of an experience can also occur with some delay, in the sense that the interpretative skills acquired at a later point in time enable me to discern new possibilities of sense in a past event.[37]

The reason why this is possible is due to the fact that Russian Communism and flute concertos *project worlds* (though in very different ways) that can be related to a Christian understanding of reality. Even a non-liberal understanding of theology will not operate with a dualism that only distinguishes between the Christian and the secular realm. Rather, it is possible to discriminate – *from* the Christian perspective – within the non-Christian perspectives between *logoi* that are 'closer' or 'further away' from the Christian *Logos*. In other words, there are *degrees of similarity*. One even has to go a step further. Since the Christian perspective is not something that is already fully given (synchronically and diachronically), even the most radical atheist critique of Christianity may (under certain circumstances), turn out to be an appropriate 'remedy' for Christian theology, which purges it from its non-Christian contaminations. Therefore these non-Christian perspectives can be critically and constructively related to, or even combined with the Christian *Logos*, without denying the latter's criteriological priority or absoluteness. Nonetheless, if such a self-critical process of interpretation takes place, it is the Christian theologian and/or the Church which decides whether an external and critical interpretation of Christianity needs to be accepted or not.

The only problem is that such an interpretative competence or gift of discernment – which is to a certain extent 'possessed' by human beings – is hardly compatible with Barth's understanding of revelation as developed in the *Prolegomena*. This is not to deny that there *are* certain hints that point in the direction of an understanding of faith as interpretative skill (cf. *KD* I/1, 58). Nonetheless, the negative statements undoubtedly have a greater weight. For this reason one is almost compelled to inter-

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59, italics mine). Yet does this really constitute an additional criterion? Rather, if these conditions are fulfilled, it must be manifest *in* the text or speech produced by the human preacher. That is, human speech must have distinct features that can be examined and assessed by a qualified authority.

[37] This is not to say that there cannot be new experiences to which we *react* linguistically.

pret the above passages in terms of a *voluntarism* that tends to bypass God's Trinitarian self-revelation – which otherwise plays an important role in Barth's theology.

d) *Strong voluntarism*: In c), creaturely sign-vehicles are still indispensable. Even if they are – at least in extreme cases – stripped of all the meanings they represent. Now the most radical version of difference consists in what could be called a *fully developed voluntarism* that even does away with 'empty' sign-vehicles. In other words, it is believed that meanings can be immediately apprehended by the human mind, without the mediation of signs, i.e. *by intuition*.

From a Trinitarian perspective, one could say that the third person of the Trinity operates wholly independently of the second person. To be sure, this model does not play an important role in the *Prolegomena*. Nonetheless, Barth explicitly mentions this possibility. He approvingly quotes from a *Reformed Synod* of 1624, which distinguishes between the *external* (Word and sacrament) and the *internal* (Holy Spirit) aspect of a human being's calling. But, as he points out, not *every* conversion can be analysed into an objective and a subjective element. In some rare cases, God may call somebody merely *interno tantum Spiritus sancti lumine ac numine absque externo verbi sui ministerio ad se vocat*. This internal enlightenment is sufficient to achieve salvation, even if it is not God's usual way of evoking faith. Accordingly, the author of the Confession admits that this type of conversion, by an internal testimony of the Spirit alone, is not only extraordinary (*extraordinarius*), but also unknown to us (*nobisque incognitus*).[38] Nonetheless, God *may* act in this way any time he wants to. However, due to his theocentric orientation, Barth emphatically points out that this inner testimony of the Spirit is neither to be confused with the notion of *innate ideas*, nor with the idea of an *internal light* that is part of human nature. Rather, even if the objective aspect of revelation is abandoned, it is still *God* who acts and *bestows* the gift of the Spirit *upon* a particular person.

The origin of this model of revelation lies in the Middle Ages. According to the late medieval notion of God's *potentia absoluta*, there is the possibility of *notitia intuitiva* of non-existents: „*cognitio intuitiva potest esse per potentiam divinam de obiecto non existente*".[39] Ockham claims that God is able to produce the effects of secondary causes even if the latter are absent so that everything can be attributed to his omnipotence, provided it does not entail anything self-contradictory. As a result, divine action not only bypasses the 'primary sacrament' Jesus Christ, and thereby loses its Trinitarian character, but also cancels out all mediation by creaturely signs.[40]

[38] *Synopsis Purioris Theologiæ* (1624), Disp. 30, 32-33.
[39] W. of Ockham, *Quodlibeta Septem*, VI, q. 6. My italics.
[40] Cf. H. Obermann, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 30-56.

3 The 'soteriological approach': the correspondence between divine and human speech

A great deal of what Barth writes in the *Prolegomena*, however, points in the direction of a possible *correspondence* between divine and human speech. Already in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, the time-eternity dualism which dominated the early stage of his theology – and which also accounts for the problems in connection with the difference-in-unity model discussed above – at times gives way to a theologically more convincing *soteriological model*. What hinders human beings from talking appropriately about God and the world is not their finitude but their *fallenness*. The focus is no longer on the fact that God acts in a *creaturely* reality, but that he acts in a creaturely reality that *contradicts him* (cf. *KD* I/1, 174). Accordingly, the problem is not that our communicative acts need to rely on *creaturely* signs, but only that we do not use these signs in a theologically *appropriate* way. Barth writes: "We will not say: *finitum*, but we will say: *homo peccator non capax* – and we will not continue: *infiniti*, but *verbi Domini*" (*KD* I/1, 231). This opens up space for a true being-together (*Beieinandersein*) or union (*Einssein*) of the divine and the human *Logos* (*KD* I/1, 255). "The miracle of real proclamation does not consist in the fact that the willing and doing of proclaiming man with all its conditioning and in all its problems is set aside, that in some way a disappearance takes place and a gap arises in the reality of nature, and that in some way there steps into this gap naked divine reality […] God and the human element are not two co-existing and co-operating factors. The human element is what God created. Only in a state of disobedience is it a factor standing over against God. In the state of obedience it is *service* of God" (*KD* I/1, 95f). Thus the soteriological approach underlines the *finite* character of creation but at the same time emphasises that human beings are rendered capable by God's salvific intervention to construe reality in a way that reveals the world as God's good creation.

The soteriological approach therefore raises the question of how the nature of this being-together (*Beieinandersein*) or union (*Einssein*) between the divine and the human *Logos* is to be thought of. In other words, it needs to be examined how we are to conceive divine presence within the spatio-temporal realm. To put this semiotically, the following analysis will investigate how far Barth's conception of divine revelation is grounded in a *triadic understanding of the sign*. For as outlined in part one, it is precisely the triadic theory of the sign which tries to do justice to the *finite* conditions under which all our processes of signification and communication take place. A genuinely incarnational theology cannot ignore this philosophical insight but at the same time faces the task of elucidating how the presence of the *infinite* in the finite can be thought of.

The idea of *divine speech* will remain the pivot around which this examination revolves. In chapter A) I shall take a *'bottom-up' approach* to divine speech, which means that revelation is analysed from the *anthropological perspective of faith*. This investigation will lead to an understanding of faith as *meaning-fulfilment* and (to a

certain extent) to a theory of *meaning as reference* or *semantics*. Divine speech is that factor in this process which precipitates meaning-fulfilment or which (re-)establishes the revelatory meaning of a term.

In chapter B), by contrast, I shall take a *'top-down' approach to* divine speech, in the sense that the analysis will be based on a *sender-related pragmatic theory*.[41] This attempt proves useful since Barth's theocentric theology stresses the agency of the sender at the expense of that of the addressee. However, as the formula which serves as the hermeneutical paradigm in the second part of this essay suggests – *s* interprets *x* as *y* to *a* in the context *c* – there are *receiver-related* pragmatic factors that need to be taken into account as well. For communication to be successful, both the codes and sub-codes of the sender and those of the addressee must be paid attention to – even if they only emerge in the course of communication. And it is primarily the receiver-related pragmatic factors which are neglected by Barth. There is an imbalance insofar as Barth (for theological reasons) disregards the codes that are always already assigned to a sign-vehicle and the specific position it occupies in the semiotic system of a culture. Barth's ideal is that the revelatory meaning which the sign-vehicle comes to signify is *exclusively* based on the meaning-bestowing act of the sender. But as I shall try to show, this neglection of receiver-related pragmatic factors has far-reaching consequences for the question of authority.

In any case, the following analyses of divine speech on the basis of a 'bottom-up' and a 'top-down' approach make abundantly clear that Barth's conception of divine revelation is *not* informed by a triadic understanding of the sign.

A) A 'bottom-up' approach to divine speech

a) The noetic aspect and pragmatics

It has been pointed out most recently that Barth's notion of divine revelation *is* based on a triadic understanding of semiosis.[42] But can this claim really be substantiated?

Barth distinguishes between God's primary and secondary objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) (*KD* II/1, 15-18). As God first and foremost knows himself in his intra-divine life, he is also first and foremost objective to himself (*primary* objectivity). Only secondarily God becomes an object of knowledge for creation as well (*secondary* objectivity). The latter is only possible since God lets himself be known by us *as* he knows himself. However, there is a fundamental difference between these two modes of knowledge. Whereas God knows himself immediately, our knowledge of God is always mediated by creaturely signs, which are as such *non*-divine, i.e. different from God. Nonetheless, this *indirect* knowledge of God is *real* knowledge of him and it is *only* real if it is indirect. Accordingly, human beings stand *directly* before a creaturely object, one of the series of all other creaturely objects, but only *indirectly* before God. The objectivity of this object *stands for* God's objectivity. In perceiving (*wahrnehmen*), considering (*anschauen*) and comprehending (*begreifen*) *this object*,

[41] E. v. Savigny, *Zeichen*, 1792-1794.
[42] M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*, 267.

human beings perceive, consider and comprehend *God* – without blurring the fundamental difference between creation and creator. To identify the creaturely object *itself* with the divine, i.e. to abstract from its revelatory framework, would amount to idolatry. No contingent-historical entity can be equated with the content of revelation. The subject as well as the content of revelation is only *God himself*. Thus the attempt to elevate the *historical figure* Jesus of Nazareth to an object of worship comes down to an idolisation of creation.[43]

According to Barth, creaturely objects only become signs of divine presence due to God's *foundation* and *institution*. An essential aspect of Barth's critique of the Catholic *analogia entis* is to emphasise that these objects do signify divine presence because God presses them into service and not by virtue of an *inherent capacity*. In their original context, these creaturely objects do not signify God, nor are they apt *to become* testimonies to revelation. Rather, this foundation and institution is accomplished by the "omnipotence of the divine will" (*KD* I/2, 244; cf. II/1, 260). As Moxter puts it, Barth's concept of the sign is not "ontologically grounded" but "pragmatically interpreted".[44] Yet it is not entirely clear what the difference between 'ontological' and 'pragmatical' in this context really consists in. For even if particular attention is paid to the pragmatic dimension of meaning, this need not necessarily be a hindrance to developing an ontology. If one translates Moxter's use of the term 'ontological' into semiotic idiom, one could perhaps say that there is *no iconicity* between the creaturely object and what it stands for.[45] This interpretation will at least serve as the starting point for the following discussion.

Moxter believes that there is only one exception to the above principle in Barth's theology, which concerns the relationship between the *miracle of the virgin birth* and the *mystery of the incarnation*.[46] That is to say, here we do find a relation of iconicity since the virgin birth (signifier) does 'resemble' the incarnation (signified).[47] According to Barth, the virgin birth can only signify the incarnation as there is a *noetic* and *ontic* analogy between the two relata.[48] What does this analogy consist in? Barth answers in the following way: The virgin birth denotes the *mystery* of revelation (incarnation), i.e. God, and *only* God, stands at the beginning of revelation, and not the arbitrary abilities of a human being; God *reveals* himself in Jesus Christ out of the *hiddennes* of his divinity; God reveals himself by *veiling* himself. And it is a *noetic*

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[43] K. Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, 108-110. Since the discipline of history is perspectival too, one must speak of a *plurality* of historical disciplines. What Barth has in mind here, however, is the picture of the 'historical Jesus' which dominated his time. Barth's critique is inaccurate as he seems to think that revelation is something *in addition* to this (supposedly) 'neutral' historical Jesus.

[44] M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*, 260.

[45] Peirce provides various definitions of iconicity. For instance, the sign *resembles* that which it stands for (*CP* 3.362), or it *takes part* in the characters of the object (*CP* 4.531). For a critique of the traditional understanding of iconicity see U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 191ff.

[46] M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*, 260, fn 384.

[47] In fact, there is at least one more 'exception', namely the relation between the *tomb* and the *mystery of revelation*. For Barth, the virgin birth and the empty tomb belong together and form *one single sign* (*KD* I/2, 199).

[48] „A sign must, of course, signify. To do so it must have in itself something of the kind of thing it signifies; it must be in analogy with it noetically and ontically" (*KD* I/2, 198).

and *ontic* analogy since, like God's Trinitarian revelation (in Christ and Spirit), also the virgin birth consists of an objective and a subjective aspect, i.e. it has an ontic as well as a noetic dimension. Accordingly, there are two different ways in which its miraculous character can be misinterpreted. On the subjective level, it may be regarded as an error, illusion, fiction, etc., and on the objective level it can be viewed as a *hitherto* unexplained creaturely mystery that is in principle explainable without recourse to God (*KD* I/2, 198).

In what follows I will make an attempt to reinterpret Moxter's distinction between an 'ontological' and a 'pragmatic' understanding of the sign. First, I shall try to show that it is possible to construe Barth's understanding of the sign in *ontological* terms – provided one takes the whole process of revelation or divine semiosis into account. The second point concerns the relationship between the miracle of the virgin birth and the mystery of incarnation. At first glance, there seems indeed to be a kind of ('horizontal') iconicity between the sign (virgin birth) and what it stands for (incarnation). However, a closer look reveals that what *really* connects these two events is their common ('vertical') *divine grounding*. More precisely, they both only signify their revelatory meanings insofar as they are part of a divine act of communication. In *this* sense, it is correct to say that there is an *ontological* bond between them.

a) Barth's insistence that both events (i.e. the virgin birth and the incarnation) can only be grasped if one takes the noetic *as well as* the ontic aspect into account can be interpreted in terms of a *semiotic* (*or triadic*) *understanding of 'being'*. For this reason, one should not establish too quickly a contrast between an ontological foundation of the sign and a pragmatic interpretation. Already in the 1920s Barth develops a theory of revelation which transcends the traditional divide between realism and idealism.[49] Yet what he calls the "real reality" (*Röm* I, 87) or the "most real" (*KD* IV/1, 88) denotes first and foremost the eschatological reality of the risen Christ. Hence the world only 'is' insofar as it participates in this reality, and what mediates between these two realms is Barth's an- and enhypostatic Christology.[50] This eschatological reality of the risen Christ is always already disclosed and directed at a human subject (*KD* IV/2, 136). On the other hand, even in the act of revelation, God remains the *non-given*. He is the self-revealing subject and can only be known in and through himself.[51] But in freely revealing himself to us God does become the object of our experience – which always consists of an *external* (ontic) and an *internal* (noetic) aspect.[52] In other words, the eschatological reality of the risen Christ is only present to us in that God addresses human beings through creaturely signs which come to convey a divine content. This leads us back to the ontic and noetic analogy between the miracle of the virgin birth and the mystery of incarnation.

Although Barth develops an explicitly *theological* understanding of reality, the formal aspect of his theory to a certain extent parallels issues that are discussed in

[49] Cf. *Röm* II, 88, 144; *Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie*, 360f.
[50] Cf. K. Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, 191ff.
[51] Ibid., 105f.
[52] K. Barth, *Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie*, 360f.

contemporary philosophy.[53] Simon tries to develop a general ontology within the framework of his philosophy of the sign. From this perspective, the philosophical discipline of ontology amounts to an interpretation of the sign 'being'. If somebody says in a particular context and to a certain addressee, '*x* is *y*', without there being a need to replace the word 'is' by another, more concrete sign, 'is' can be regarded as a copula which *immediately* leads to acceptance: "'Being' means that the passage from the subject to the predicate, as an explication of the subject, is understood 'immediately', thus without detour via a further contextual sign, and therefore without detour via a sign more concrete in comparison with 'is'. 'Being' is the sign for such an 'immediately' successful outcome […] so that *nothing* more is to be *said* about it …".[54]

b) Once again, on a formal level there are indeed similarities to Barth's theology, insofar as both approaches transcend the dichotomy between realism and idealism. But Barth is not at all concerned with establishing criteria for a general ontology. This is also the reason why there cannot be a merely formal analogy between the virgin birth and the incarnation. Rather, there is an ontological bond between these events since both of them are grounded in the same *divine reality*. More precisely, what renders Barth's ontology a *theological* ontology, or a *theocentric* ontology, is the fact that *God* selects the sign-vehicle (ontic aspect) out of a great number of possible sign-vehicles, and also provides the (new) meaning of this sign-vehicle (noetic aspect). Only thus does God's action in the world comprise the *totality* of creaturely reality (cf. *KD* I/2, 198). According to Barth's model, the incarnation and the virgin birth are not signs that denote a pre-linguistic divine realm. Rather, God figures as the *subject of a speech-act* that interprets something *as* something *to* somebody and thus brings the chain of interpretation to an end. And the 'is' in the statement '*x* is *y*' stands exactly for this termination, i.e. an *immediate understanding* is accomplished so that no further signs are required. In the *Prolegomena*, Barth hardly ever deploys explicitly ontological terminology. But there are nonetheless a number of statements that clearly support such an interpretation: "'God's Word' means: God speaks […] It is *the* truth as it is God's speaking person, *Dei loquentis persona* […] It is *the* objective reality, in that it is also *the* subjective, the subjective that is God" (*KD* I/1, 141).

It follows from this that Barth's theocentric *ontology* entails a *pragmatic* dimension (the noetic aspect) so that there cannot be a (direct) *contrast* between an ontological and a pragmatic understanding of the sign. Thus the sign of the virgin birth and its iconic relation to the incarnation via the ontic and noetic aspect of divine revelation is not an exception. Rather, this Trinitarian structure is the paradigm of divine action *par excellence*. However, it goes without saying that this extremely tentative interpretation of Barth's idea of revelation on the basis of Simon's philosophical ontology does *not* lead to a satisfactory theological ontology. In actual fact,

[53] Cf. „Realismus und Idealismus sind keine absoluten Gegensätze, keine einander ausschließenden dogmatischen Möglichkeiten mehr, sondern sie sind auf vielfältige Weise miteinander verzwickt – jedenfalls, was den Prozeß der Erkenntnisbildung und -strukturierung angeht", H. Lenk, *Interpretation und Realität*, 258.
[54] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, 123.

the result is an *actualistic ontology*. A more sophisticated theory would have to take into account the diachronic aspect as well. But this project cannot be pursued here.

The differentiation between the ontic and the noetic aspect raises a further question: Every creaturely sign-vehicle can assume a range of different meanings which is delineated by the semiotic system of a particular culture. But how are we to think the relationship between these possible meanings and the meaning(s) the sign-vehicle takes on in the act of revelation? A merely pragmatic understanding of the sign – what Moxter calls the 'normal' case in Barth and which is opposed to the alleged 'exception' discussed above – would amount to overemphasising the noetic *at the expense* of the ontic aspect. Put differently, the divine selection of sign-vehicles from the creaturely realm would then be viewed as something completely arbitrary. This would again lead to a kind of 'semi-voluntarism'.

However, the reason why the notion of an arbitrary selection of a sign-vehicle is unintelligible is not due to the fact that there is an iconic relationship between the signifier and the signified. That is to say, the restrictions as regards the selection are due to the *meanings* a sign-vehicle may represent in a given semiotic system. Already Saussure emphasised that the bond between the signifier and the signified is utterly arbitrary and bestows on the whole language system (*langue*) a *conventional* character. But although the signifiers are apparently freely chosen with respect to the ideas they represent, they are nonetheless *immutable* with respect to the linguistic community that uses them. Yet Saussure of course allows for a diachronic change of meanings, for such shifts of meaning can easily be detected if one analyses languages historically.

Accordingly, for divine revelation to be meaningful, God's *parole* must take the culturally determined codes of a particular langue into account, otherwise it will remain unintelligible and devoid of any transformative power. This has of course consequences for the perennial theological debate about the relationship between nature and grace (cf. III, 1, B, e).

b) Semantics

Nonetheless, even if there cannot be a direct contrast between a pragmatic and an ontological understanding of the sign, Barth's use of the ontic and noetic aspect is to a certain extent *asymmetrical* or *unbalanced*. In spite of the fact that the notion of an 'arbitrary' selection of a sign-vehicle is unintelligible, Barth's understanding of revelation comes close to such a view and is therefore not informed by triadic semiosis. This imbalance or asymmetry now needs to be further investigated. However, it is not my intention to find *one* single theory of meaning that matches Barth's understanding of revelation best. Rather, as indicated above, I shall look at his model of divine speech from different angles and accordingly select in each case that theory of meaning which is best suited to shed light on the point at issue. In this chapter, revelation will be analysed from the *anthropological perspective of faith*, leading to three different, though interrelated hermeneutical models: *faith as meaning fulfilment*, *(revelatory) meaning as reference* and *a narrative approach to meaning*. These three approaches to divine revelation are grouped under the heading 'semantics' since they

primarily deal with the relationship between the sign and that which it stands for, whereas the syntactic and pragmatic dimensions of meaning recede into the background.

To begin with, I shall investigate Barth's understanding of faith in comparison with Husserl's theory of *evidence* or *meaning-fulfilment*.[55]

Knowledge and faith as meaning-fulfilment

Moxter holds that Barth's concept of revelation is based on the idea of *representation*. Since knowledge of God is always mediated by signs, Barth's theology transcends a naïve realism as well as a naïve constructivism. To further explore this tenet of Barth's approach, he draws a comparison between divine revelation in Barth and Husserl's theory of representation.[56]

According to Willard, Husserl's work on knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) can be divided into three mains stages: the first phase spans the time up until 1894 which culminates in the articulation of the pivotal concept of *fulfilment*. The second stage ends in the fifth *Logical Investigation* where he eliminates the 'immanent object' and develops a theory of intentionality in which fulfilment establishes a *real* relationship between the representation and a mind-independent object. The third stage terminates in the sixth *Logical Investigation* where he characterises knowledge as a higher-order act: "The actual union of the conceptualizing act *with the object*, on the basis of a corresponding intuition of that object together with a recognition of the identity of the object of the concept and of the perception, is *what knowledge is as an act*".[57] Husserl's early essay of 1894, *Psychological Studies in the Elements of Logic*, which belongs to the first phase of his work, will serve as the starting point for the intended comparison.[58]

According to Husserl, it is possible to draw a distinction between presentations (*Vorstellungen*) which are intuitions (*Anschauungen*) and those which are representations (*Repräsentationen*).[59] Representations do no include their objects in themselves as immanent contents, i.e. the objects are not present within consciousness but are merely *intended*. That is to say, a content that is *not* in consciousness is aimed at, minded or referred to with understanding (*mit Verständnis hindeuten*), by means of some contents which *are* given in consciousness.

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[55] At least as far as Husserl is concerned, it is somewhat misleading to discuss it under the title *Semantics*. As Simons writes: "One indisputable effect of the transcendental turn on Husserl's semantics is that questions of actual truth and reference are among those "bracketed" in the phenomenological reductions, so a fully-fledged semantics, a theory designed to explicate the relationship between language and extra-linguistic reality, cannot find a place within transcendental phenomenology", P. Simons, *Meaning and language*, 126. Yet there is nonetheless a semantic dimension to Husserl's philosophy provided one focuses on the terms *evidence* and *meaning-fulfilment*.

[56] M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*, 263-273. Moxter draws on Adriaanse's 1974 doctoral thesis which explores the relationship between Barth's and Husserl's early thought: see H.J. Adriaanse, *Zu den Sachen selbst*. The latest works Adriaanse takes into account are Barth's *Röm* II of 1922 and Husserl's *Logical Investigations* of 1900/01 (2nd Ed. 1913/22).

[57] D. Willard, *Knowledge*, 152.

[58] E. Husserl, *Psychologische Studien zur Elementaren Logik*.

[59] Ibid., 107f.

Intuitions, by contrast, are presentations or psychic experiences that do not merely intend their objects but which really include those in themselves as their immanent contents. Now each representation points, directly or indirectly, in the direction of an intuition that corresponds to it but which is not actual.[60] By contrast, not every intuition is based on a preceding representation. Yet if there does occur a transition from a representation to an intuition, the *intention* of the intending subject is *fulfilled*.

Husserl gives the following example to illustrate the above distinction. Suppose I stand in front of 'our theatre' and perceive it. An 'ordinary consciousness', as Husserl calls it, believes to have an intuition of the theatre *as such*. This idea Husserl rejects as *mere illusion*, for as he points out, only "a small part of that which we here *presume* to intuit is really intuited".[61] Accordingly, the theatre *in its totality* cannot be the content of our consciousness. Hence it would be inappropriate to equate perception (*Wahrnehmung*) – which Husserl also interprets etymologically as 'holding-to-be-so' (*Fürwahrnehmen*) – with intuition. Rather, perception presupposes an intentional act that goes beyond intuition and which is therefore based on representation. If we perceive the façade of the theatre, our intentional act furnishes it with two side-walls, a back-wall, a ceiling, etc. However, our intention can be converted into intuition when we walk around the theatre and look at the building from all sides. If this happens, the intention has been *fulfilled*, representation has passed over into intuition, and perception and intuition coincide.[62] Yet we cannot gain an intuition of everything that we represent conceptually. This is either due to a *de facto* inability or an evident impossibility. Examples of conceptual representations which fall into the latter category are the well-known 'round square' or 'wooden iron'. But the fact that these examples are necessarily non-intuitional does not mean that they are *meaningless*. On the contrary, Husserl stresses that they have a wholly determinate and well-understood intention, although one that cannot be fulfilled since it is directed towards something impossible.[63] It follows from this that the range of representations is not restricted to sense perception.

Furthermore, it would be inappropriate to call a representation an intuition in view of its immanent content. The sharp distinction Husserl draws between intuition and representation does *not* spring from the fact that a certain intentional act simply intuits *some* contents without intuiting *others*. For this would amount to saying that representations simply focus on a *selection* of possible contents. In the above example, we would then direct our attention, for instance, to the windows of the theatre while neglecting other aspects of the building. By contrast, intuition and representation are different *modes of consciousness*. A further example illustrates well the sharpness of this distinction. Suppose we look at certain figures or arabesques from a purely aesthetical perspective and then, all of a sudden, come to realise that they could be symbols or word-signs *representing* meanings.[64] In that very moment, the figure or ara-

[60] But Husserl also says that there are representations which are "necessarily non-intuitional" (see below and ibid., 104)
[61] Ibid., 102f.
[62] H.J. Adriaanse, *Zu den Sachen selbst*, 37.
[63] E. Husserl, *Psychologische Studien zur Elementaren Logik*, 104.
[64] Ibid., 114f.

besque has become a *sign*, i.e. a *representing* content. And although we still 'see' the sign, we no longer focus upon nor intuit it.[65]

Following Adriaanse, Moxter points out that Barth's distinction between 'religion proper' and 'religion improper', between Christian faith and religion as a merely human projection can be grasped on the basis of this distinction. As we have seen, Barth's understanding of revelation is based on a dialectical interplay between God's veiling and unveiling. Revelation is always mediated by signs but we miss it and commit an act of idolatry if we direct our attention *to the signs themselves*, rather than referring them to that which they stand for, i.e. to that which they *represent*. In other words, Christian faith is a mode of consciousness in which consciousness is not directed to its immanent content, the creaturely signs, but reaches out to the object *by means of these signs*.[66] Whereas Christian faith understands the sign *as a sign*, 'religion improper' mistakes the sign for the object itself.[67]

In Barth, this character of intentionality is more developed in *Röm* II (1922) than in *Röm* I (1919), even if he of course does not use Husserl's phenomenological terminology.[68] For instance, in *Röm* II, Barth talks of the *form* of a content: "Immer ist die göttliche, die sinngebende, die erfüllende *Form* diesen seelisch-geschichtlichen *Inhalten* gegenüber ein Jenseitiges, ein unverwischbar Anderes" (*Röm* II, 114). The contents as such do not have a meaning with regard to revelation, which is the actual object of faith. It is only when human beings construe this psychically and historically given content within the interpretative framework of faith that revelation really takes place. Thus, on the sensual-empirical level, there is no difference between Christian baptism and the initiation rites of the mystery-religions (*Röm* II, 187). In both cases the sensually given content is the *submersion in water*. It is only the bestowal of faith by divine grace – that is never simply at one's disposal – which enables human beings to comprehend it as a Christian act. Moxter emphasises the significance of the concept of intentionality for a proper understanding of faith, as the object cannot be separated from its *mode of givenness*. However, his comparison of Barth and Husserl tends to play down the importance of the concept of *fulfilment* in the thought of *both* Husserl and Barth.[69]

Edmund Husserl

As far as Husserl is concerned, at least up until 1913, when he completed the fourth section of his *Ideas*, his main philosophical interest was the clarification of the concept of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*).[70] There can be no doubt that during this period, for him knowledge of an object *coincides* with the fulfilment of the meaning of the in-

[65] Ibid., 116.
[66] H.J. Adriaanse, *Zu den Sachen selbst*, 51f.
[67] „Der Offenbarungsbegriff ruht also auf einem Begriff der Zeichenrepräsentation auf […] Der religiöse Vollzug, der sich nicht als Wahrnehmungsakt, sondern als Repräsentation aufbaut, bleibt in Barths Offenbarungstheologie auf eine Differenzstruktur bezogen, in der er seine Kritik *und* seine Erfüllung findet", M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*, 265.
[68] H.J. Adriaanse , *Zu den Sachen selbst*, 140-143.
[69] Cf. M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*, 264, fn 404; 265, fn 409.
[70] D. Willard, *Knowledge*, 138ff.

tention upon this object. "Talk about knowledge of an object, and talk about fulfilling a meaning-intention, therefore expresses the same fact, merely from differing standpoints" (*LU* VI, § 8).

Thus, as Jaako Hintikka points out, the question arises of *what it is* that fulfils a noema. Is it something that belongs to the sphere of objects or to the sphere of a noemata? If the former is the case, one has to recall that the factual existence of an object has been bracketed in the phenomenological reductions. Accordingly, the phenomenon of fulfilment would defy any phenomenological analysis. If the latter is the case, it remains unclear how the fulfilling act can establish a correlation between the noemata and reality.[71]

Hintikka opts for the first possibility. What constitutes the phenomenological element in Husserl's philosophy, he contends, is his aim to find a basis for our conceptual world in *immediate experience*. The centre of Husserl's (earlier) thought therefore consists in the conviction that that which is immediately given to me is at once part of an external, i.e. mind-independent reality *and* an element of my consciousness. Hence fulfilment and knowledge consist in a real correspondence between consciousness and reality. Consequently, Hintikka regards the phenomenological reductions which bracket the factual existence of objects and direct our attention to the conceptual world of noemata merely as a prerequisite for Husserl's overall phenomenological project.

The pivot of Husserl's thought, however, is the insight that real knowledge requires "an actual interface or overlap of my consciousness and reality".[72] A name, for instance, designates a particular object insofar as it *means* it. Now if the object is not intuitively present, we only have to do with meaning. Yet if the originally empty meaning-intention is fulfilled, a real relation is established between name and object named. Accordingly, one has to draw a distinction between meaning-intentions that are void of intuition and those which are fulfilled by intuition. Thus on the one hand there are *meaning-conferring acts* or *meaning-intentions*, i.e. verbal sounds infused with sense (expressions). On the other hand, there are acts which are not essential to the expression but which fulfil those meaning-intentions more or less adequately by realising the relations to the corresponding objects. These acts are called *meaning-fulfilling acts*. In the case of knowledge and fulfilment, the latter fuse with the meaning-conferring acts (*LU* I, § 9). It is thus possible to draw a clear distinction between meaning and object. At the same time these two aspects are closely related to each other in every expression, for an expression can only refer to an objective correlate because it carries a certain meaning. It thus signifies the object through its meaning. However, several expressions may have the same meaning but different objects or they may have different meanings but the same object. For instance, two names can differ in meaning but nonetheless have the same object. Thus the names 'the victor at Jena' and 'the vanquished at Waterloo' certainly have different meanings even if the same object is meant. Conversely, Husserl contends, the expression 'horse' has the

[71] J. Hintikka, *The phenomenological dimension*, 81.
[72] Ibid., 82.

same meaning in whatever context it is used. But if we say 'Bucephalus is a horse' and on a different occasion 'That cart-horse is a horse', the object is obviously different. But there is of course also the possibility that two expressions differ, or agree, in both respects. Examples of an agreement between expressions regarding meaning *and* object are synonymous expressions in different languages such as 'zwei' and 'deux', or 'London' and 'Londres' (*LU* I, § 12).

Phenomenological reduction can be understood in terms of an elimination of everything that falls outside the sphere of things that are purely *self-given*. For only what is self-given bridges the gap between what is merely intended and the extra-mental reality. And the medium of self-givenness is intuition (*Anschauung*): something is immediately given to us in experience.[73] Hence it is not correct to say that phenomenology is exclusively concerned with the noetic-noematic correlation, for it also investigates the relation between noemata and their objects.

However, the key term intuition does not just apply to sense perception and empirical intuition but must be understood in the broadest possible sense. Put differently, Husserl allows for non-sensuous intuitions, i.e. there are non-sensuous kinds of immediate givenness.[74] Yet, more importantly, what is (self-)given in an immediate experience (intuition) is not the noema ('the object as intended') but the object itself.[75] As Hintikka points out, the 'phenomenological residuum', i.e. that which survives the transcendental reduction "possesses a dual citizenship" insofar as it belongs at once to human consciousness *and* to the real world.[76] For this reason, there cannot be an absolute end point in the phenomenological reduction. Whatever becomes the object of a phenomenological reflection "has already been structured by a form-giving noesis".[77] It follows from this that no phenomenological reduction will lead us to mind-independent objects that are "conceptually self-given".[78] Yet it would be wrong to overemphasise this 'idealist' aspect for in intuition we nonetheless do perceive a mind-independent reality.

Karl Barth

As far as Barth is concerned, Adriaanse indeed emphasises the intentional character of Christian faith: "In the act of faith, the object is only minded (*bedeutet*); there is no fulfilling intuition".[79] But he *also* says that the representational or signitive aspect of faith can give way to intentional *fulfilment* and *intuition*, to use Husserl's terminology. The object which is merely intended in faith can also be *given in faith*.[80] At first glance it might seem as if Barth in *Röm* II entirely abandons his understanding of faith as a kind of intuition which dominates *Röm* I. But Adriaanse argues that this is not the case. To be sure, that which faith intends cannot be fulfilled on the level of

[73] Cf. E. Husserl, *Ideen* I, § 24.
[74] Ibid., § 19.
[75] Ibid., § 43, 48.
[76] J. Hintikka, *The phenomenological dimension*, 90.
[77] Ibid., 98.
[78] Ibid.
[79] H.J. Adriaanse, *Zu den Sachen selbst*, 151.
[80] Ibid., 151-153.

sensual perception (*sinnliche Anschauung*). Nonetheless, even if God never is or becomes an object but always remains the non-given, the non-given can *give himself*, and from an anthropocentric perspective this event can be construed in terms of an *intuition* or *meaning-fulfilment*. Yet it is important to notice that the move from representation to fulfilment and intuition in *Röm* II must *not* be understood as a transition from 'mere faith' to a superior *visio* which leads *beyond* faith. Faith, although it presses towards and leads to vision, is also faith *without* vision, and where it finds its fulfilment in vision, *remains* faith (*Röm* II, 139, 143, but see 82). Thus faith has a dynamical character: *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστίν* (Rom 1:17). Furthermore, the question arises under which circumstances the transition from representation to intuition is achieved. Barth's answer is clear: This happens in preaching, the oral proclamation of the Word.[81] This of course leads back to Barth's understanding of God as *persona loquens*, which will be analysed at length in chaper B) from the perspective of a speaker (or sender)-related pragmatic approach.

For the present moment it suffices to point out that the Husserlian category of intuition and meaning-fulfilment is also relevant to understand Barth's *later* theology. In § 6 of the *Church Dogmatics* which is devoted to the *knowability* of God, Barth writes:

> By the *knowledge* (*Erkenntnis*) of an object by men we understand confirmation (*Bewährung*) of their acquaintance with its reality in respect of its existence (*hinsichtlich seines Daseins oder seiner Existenz*) and its nature (*hinsichtlich seines Soseins oder seines Wesens*). But 'confirmation of their acquaintance' means: the reality of the object concerned, its existence and its nature, being true in themselves, now becomes in some way, and with some degree of clarity and distinctness, true for men […] This event, this confirmation we call, in contrast to mere cognizance (*Kenntnis*), knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). Cognizance turns into knowledge when man becomes a responsible witness to its content" (*KD* I/1, 195f, cf. 239, 250, 256).

From 'meaning as reference' to narrativity

Meaning as reference

In § 27 of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth discusses the *limits of the knowledge of God* from a consistently *theocentric* perspective. Here too, God is thought of as the *subject* (primary agent) in the divine-human encounter and not simply as an *object* of human perception. Yet the notion of divine *speech* recedes into the background. Barth here rather examines how divine revelation transforms and redeems the postlapsarian use of human language, often focusing on the meaning of *single* words. Despite the theocentric character of this section, I shall analyse § 27 from an *anthropocentric* perspective – as in the preceding chapter. More concretely, I suggest interpreting § 27 on the basis of a theory of *meaning as reference* – even if one has to clarify immediately what kind of 'referent' is at stake. According to Barth, empirical objects are no possible candidates for the *theological* referents and 'redeemed' meanings of linguistic terms. Nonetheless, an interpretation of revelation on the basis of a theory of 'meaning as reference' seems legitimate due to the *sharp distinction* Barth draws between the *revelatory meaning* of a word and its *worldly pre-understanding*.

[81] Cf. K. Barth, *Fides quaerens intellectum*, 18f.

That is to say, the event of revelation and the new meanings introduced by it can be interpreted in terms of a *change of referents*. Once again, I do not claim that a theory of meaning as reference is the best possible way of approaching Barth's theology. But it is nonetheless an apt tool to shed light on *some* aspects of his understanding of revelation.

According to Barth, our words are not our properties but God's. Due to divine revelation we come to see that we use them in the postlapsarian state *improperly* and *pictorially*. Barth writes: "When we apply them [our words] to God, they are not alienated from their *original* object and therefore from their truth, but, on the contrary: *restored* to it" (*KD* II/1, 259). It is only through the divine act of revelation that the terms (re)assume their original, non-figurative and appropriate meaning in that they signify God and his acts respectively. This Christologically mediated reinstitution not only concerns explicitly theological or spiritual terms such as 'father', 'son', 'dominion', 'patience', 'love' etc., but also words which in everyday use denote body parts such as 'arm' or 'mouth'. According to Barth, there is a *radical discontinuity* between the postlapsarian and the redeemed meanings of these terms. Consequently, no clarification of the meaning and understanding of our postlapsarian human words will lead to a provisional meaning (*Vorsinn*) and understanding (*Vorverständnis*) with regard to the *divine* meaning. Rather, the provisional meaning and understanding that can be arrived at by means of such an analysis is the provisional meaning and understanding of our understanding of the *world* and of our *self*-understanding. In no way, however, does such an investigation precipitate an encounter with the Christian God (*KD* II/1, 260). The doctrine of *analogia fidei* thus emphasises that the analogical character of language is accomplished by God's Trinitarian revelation alone and not a fact that human beings can discover in the world. For instance, no idea of 'lord' or 'lordship' will ever lead us to an understanding of God as our Lord, "even if we extend it infinitely" (*KD* II/1, 82).

For this reason, Barth's theology has been characterised at once as *non-realism* and as *realism*.[82] Graham Ward tries to reduce the extremely complex discussion about realism to two fundamental axioms: first, the belief in an "immediacy of experience", and secondly, its correlate, the conviction that "language mirrors the world".[83] The idea of an 'immediate experience' is related to the notion of representation. A naïve realist holds that sense perception leads to mental ideas which are finally expressed in linguistic concepts. The relationship between concepts and ideas and between ideas and objects is thereby considered as stable and unchangeable. Now Barth's theology can be called non-realist insofar as he rejects these two axioms as regards *postlapsarian language*. Consequently, human consciousness is thought of as historically, culturally and linguistically conditioned. The notion of a realistic naturalism, which claims to have objective access to reality on the basis of sense data is rejected.

[82] G. Ward, *Barth, modernity, and postmodernity*, 284-287.
[83] Ibid., 286.

In Barth's language, human cognition (*Erkennen*) is fulfilled in views (*Anschauungen*) and concepts (*Begriffen*). Views are thereby the images (*Bilder*) in which we perceive objects (*Gegenstände*) as such. Concepts, however, are the counter-images (*Gegenbilder*) by means of which we appropriate those images of perception (*Wahrnehmungsbilder*) in that we think them and order them. This enables us to articulate (*aussprechen*) those images of perception and those objects. Now if human beings can speak of God, they must first be able to view (*anschauen*) and conceive (*begreifen*), i.e. to perceive (*wahrnehmen*) and think (*denken*) God. Otherwise they would not know him (*KD* II/1, 202f). Yet, in accordance with the tradition, Barth emphasises that *God can only be known by God*. Hence the above reflections on human cognitive capacity do not allow us to conclude that we can also know God by our views (*Anschauungen*) and concepts (*Begriffe*). To be sure, our human capacity for receiving images and creating counter-images is used *instrumentally* in the act of knowledge of God. Yet what must be contested is the view that there is an *innate capacity* for truthfully receiving images and creating counter-images with respect to God. Rather, it is God himself who ordained and created fellowship between himself and us. Surely, our viewing as such is undoubtedly capable of receiving divine images (*Götterbilder*). Likewise, our conceiving as such is capable of creating idolatrous pictures (*Götzenbilder*). But in both cases we have to do with "projections of our own glory" (*KD* II/1, 204).

We *resemble*, we *master* and we *are* originally and properly *one* with that which we can apprehend. That is to say, we resemble, master and are one with the world and everything in it. We can form views and concepts of the world and everything in it. In *viewing* and *conceiving* the world and what is in it, we *encompass* the world and what is in it. And we are superior to, and spiritual masters of what we can encompass. Furthermore, to apprehend also means to possess. Yet possession is unthinkable without original and proper unity between the possessor and the possessed. It is this unity on which our capacity to apprehend the world and everything in it is based. But all this does not apply to the relationship between God and man: "Between God and man, as between God and the creature in general, there consists an irrevocable otherness" (*KD* II/1, 212). Thus our knowledge of God inevitably begins with the knowledge of God's *hiddenness*. Yet, according to Barth, this last point should not be read as a statement about the general limitations of human cognition. Rather, the "hiddenness of God is the content of a *statement of faith*" (*KD* II/1, 206). The hiddenness of God is *God's* hiddenness, i.e. one of *his* properties.

This hiddenness of God remains even in the event of genuine *knowledge* of God. Our images of perception, thought and words as such are not images of God. But they *become* images of God and thus *become* true. Yet the capacity to receive divine truth does not reside in those images themselves but is bestowed upon them by their object (*Gegenstand*). God is no longer only the object (*Object*) of his own cognition, but also of that of man (*KD* II/1, 218, 230). On the basis of revelation, our human views and concepts, which are as such impotent, can and will participate in truth, i.e. in the knowledge of God. According to Barth's epistemology, it is possible to draw a difference between human *cognition* and human *language*. This accounts for the fact

that Barth frequently operates in § 27 with the dyad 'views and concepts' and later on with the *triad* 'views, concepts, words'. As Ward states, the fact that Barth first analyses human cognition and then moves on to examine human language is no coincidence. Rather, the aforementioned triad constitutes three successive stages leading from perceptions (*Anschauungen*), to concepts (*Begriffe*) and finally linguistic expressions (*Worte*). At least in § 27 of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth's is a *correspondence theory of truth*. Single words[84] stand for ideas which in turn represent language-independent, external objects. Consequently, truth is conceived of in terms of an adequate correspondence between those words, ideas and objects.[85]

Under postlapsarian conditions, however, there is no true correspondence between words, ideas and objects, i.e. we use our words inappropriately and pictorially. This happens "when we apply them within the confines of what is appropriate to us as creatures" (*KD* II/1, 259). But since the relationship between words, ideas and referents (objects) is not fixed once and for all, divine revelation can break it up and introduce new referents. Only the words *qua* sign-vehicles remain the same. Even the true meanings of simple words such as 'arm' and 'mouth' become only manifest if they refer to the arm and mouth of God. In other words, the semantic agnosticism and non-realism which is characteristic of the postlapsarian state, does not lead to nihilism and/or relativism but rather opens up space for Barth's *eschatological realism*. Barth thus holds that the eschatological reality of the risen Christ has "ontological and criteriological priority" over our common "experiential reality".[86]

Reflecting upon the transition from the postlapsarian to the divinely reconstituted state of language, Ward contends that "Barth adopts a nomenclatural or passive-copy theory of language as the model for the correspondence between perception, conception and language in the act of revelation whilst simultaneously rejecting such a theory of language as a description of discourse outside the act of revelation".[87] As far as the former theory is concerned, "God's language is a direct and immediate transferral of meaning from object to word, the proper adequation of signifier and signified".[88] Yet this statement needs be supplemented by Barth's insistence that even if God does claim our views, concepts and words in the act of revelation, we cannot confine ourselves to a single reconstitution between views, concepts and words. It is not possible simply to repeat certain "concepts and words to attain and express again the knowledge of God" (*KD* II/1, 240f, cf. *KD* I/1, 10ff). Barth's eschatological realism is therefore rather to be interpreted in terms of a *critical* realism.[89]

Yet here too, the question arises as to how the dynamic and teleological character of this epistemic progress – as it is characteristic of a critical realism – is to be

[84] However, even in § 27 of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth does not exclusively focus on the new meanings assumed by *single* words but at times stresses that Scripture in its totality points to God (*KD* II/1, 120). This opens up space for a *narrative theology*. I shall come back to this issue in a moment.
[85] Cf. G. Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, 26ff.
[86] I.U. Dalferth, *Karl Barth's eschatological realism*, 22.
[87] G. Ward, Barth, *Derrida and Language of Theology*, 28.
[88] Ibid.
[89] I.U. Dalferth, *Karl Barth's eschatological realism*, 16-18. Dalferth does not use the term *critical* realism explicitly. But see B.L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*.

thought of in Barth's theology. For instance, Barth writes that "any goal that is attained becomes the point of departure for a new journey on this way, on which the revelation of God and its veracity are always future to us" (*KD* II/1, 241). However, this quotation leaves unclear whether there really is room for a 'directed serialisation' in Peirce's sense, which would require a certain *continuity-in-discontinuity*. Although Barth calls dogma an "'eschatological concept'" (*KD* I/1, 284), the main thrust of his argument precisely *excludes* the possibility of such a continuity-in-discontinuity model.

Pondering on human involvement and linguistic sedimentation in the act of reception of the Word of God, Barth insists that "[n]ot for a moment or in any respect will he [i.e. a human being] want to come back (*zurückkommen*) to his involvement or cling to it (*daran sich halten*) or build upon it (*darauf weiterbauen*) …" (*KD* I/1, 231). Barth certainly does allow for the fact that the reception of divine revelation takes place in ever new contexts and situations. But this as such does not imply the existence of a teleological principle governing the series of conceptualisations and linguistic manifestations that come with these various contexts and situations. Or, if there is such a principle in Barth's theology, it has a *theocentric* character, i.e. it remains hidden and can only be *posited* by human beings – by an act of faith.[90]

A narrative approach to meaning

However, there is much in § 27 (and the rest) of the *Church Dogmatics* that renders the above interpretation of 'meaning as reference' problematic. For it remains to a certain extent unclear in *KD* II/1, which linguistic units assume (or have assumed) an analogical character in and through the act of revelation. On the one hand – as shown above – Barth's focus is on the (new) meanings of *single* terms. On the other hand, Scripture in its totality points to God, which leads to a narrative theology.[91] What takes centre stage is not single words or sentences but the narrative of God's covenant with Israel and its fulfilment in the New Testament (*KD* II/1, 120). Yet these two different hermeneutical strategies are by no means mutually exclusive but rather turn out to be interdependent. Consistently adhering to his Trinitarian approach, Barth highlights the narrative (*Logos*) as well as the perspectival or self-involving (*Pneuma*) character of theologically reconstituted linguistic meaning.

For instance, the true meaning of the word 'love' can only be grasped in the light of the relationship between Father and Son through the Holy Spirit, of which we only know since God loved the world by sending his Son (*KD* II/1, 259). That is to say, there is a *proportion* between the relationship in God himself and his relationship to the word (*KD* III/1, 52). Every attempt to think God's being must thus clarify the relationship between his *being-for-himself* and his *being-for-us.* As Jüngel has pointed out, Barth's understanding of God transcends the classical concept of *sub-*

[90] It goes without saying that if this last statement really applies to the *Prolegomena*, it is very difficult to see how the obvious linguistic *manifestness* of such a series is supposed to be compatible with the *hiddenness* of its teleological structure.

[91] As is well-known, this narrative approach constitutes the very centre of *KD* IV, and served as the starting point for the Yale school. Cf. D. Ford, *Barth and God's story*; M.I. Wallace, *The second naiveté: Barth, Ricœur, and the new Yale theology*.

stance as well as that of *relational being*.[92] According to Aristotle, first substances are neither as a whole nor in parts to be understood as relational being, i.e. they are not *necessarily* related to something else, but *can* be related to something else. *Relational being*, by contrast, (mutually) presupposes the other to which it is related. Both thought-models are inappropriate to spell out the relationship between God and the world. If God is conceived as substance, his *being-in-relation* is not sufficiently taken into account, and if he is understood as relational being, there is the danger of functionalising his relation to the world, thus making him *dependent* on the world.

In order to overcome this impasse, Barth tries to think of the freedom of God's *being-for-himself* on the basis of the revelation of God's *being-for-us*. Due to revelation, i.e. God's *being-for-us*, God's being is thought of as an *event*. The nature of God's independent being must be inferred from the event of revelation, i.e. God's independent being must be thought of as that event which makes the event of revelation possible. God's being-for-us is thus a *repetition* of his self-referentiality in his inner-Trinitarian being (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

On the basis of this *analogia relationis*, Jüngel interprets God's repetition in his revelation as a *self-interpretation*. God *is* towards the other, without being *dependent on* it.[93] According to the *modus essendi*, God's love in himself precedes ontologically his economic love, but according to the *modus cognoscendi*, we only come to know it in and through his work in space and time (*KD* I/2, § 12). It is this correspondence which allows us to interpret the meaning of the term 'love' *narratively*. In order to understand what it means that God loved the word (ἠγάπησεν), we have to (re-)tell the story of a unique event, the event of God's love (cf. Joh 3:16); the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (*KD* IV/1, 75).

Yet according to Barth, this narrative meaning of the term 'love' is not a generally observable fact. God is not only the author of the narrative itself but also imparts to human beings the ability to *recognise* this narrative as the ultimate paradigm for any understanding of love. Here too, the ontic aspect cannot be divorced from the noetic aspect. And it is Barth's *narrative* unfolding of the ontic aspect and the *perspectival* and *self-involving* character of the noetic aspect that strictly speaking do away with a theory of 'meaning as reference'. Narrativity (ontic aspect) is a *syntactic*/*syntagmatic* though-category and Barth's understanding of the perspectival and self-involving character of the noetic aspect adds a *pragmatic* dimension to his theory of linguistic meaning.

In order to grasp the account of meaning set out in *KD* II, it is helpful to distinguish between the transition from the postlapsarian (pre-)understanding of a term to its reconstituted theological meaning a), and its transformative reintegration into the semantic system of a culture b). This differentiation seems legitimate insofar as the establishment of a 'new' tradition first requires the selection of a *limited* range of terms out of an already existing semantic system, which assume new meanings and subsequently lead to a wider transformation. This hermeneutical process originated

[92] E. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 103ff.
[93] Ibid.

in the oral tradition of the post-Easter era and roughly terminated after the formation of the Canon (ca. 400 AD). The second phase however, is open-ended insofar as its ultimate eschatological goal is the comprehensive penetration and refiguration of the prevailing symbol system(s), i.e. the initiation of new cultural paradigms.

a) Barth's view that the postlapsarian (pre-)understanding of a word is utterly irrelevant in order to grasp its true, theologically reconstituted meaning, is unintelligible since it leads to a dualistic agnosticism, rather than any positive knowledge about God. If there were such an absolute (and therefore unintelligible) semantic break between the old and the new (theological) meaning, as Barth seems to suggest, God's attitude towards the world as disclosed in his salvific intervention in Christ, could have equally been called 'hatred', or 'indifference', antonyms of 'love'(*ἀγάπη*). For in order to assume its new meaning, the sign 'love' had first to be completely stripped of its original meanings. As a result, the only link between the postlapsarian and the reconstituted, theological meaning were an identical *sign-vehicle*. And since Barth emphatically points out that the revelatory meaning is the only appropriate meaning, postlapsarian language would *give way* to an ideal divine language, rather than be *transformed* by it.

In the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, this extreme contrast is at least mitigated.[94] Jüngel even devotes a whole paragraph to developing a 'general' idea of love, which he regards a prerequisite for a biblical, i.e. Christological and Trinitarian understanding of love.[95] According to him, it would be "hermeneutical nonsense"[96] to believe that the word 'love' could be arbitrarily supplanted by another one on the grounds that its true meaning can only be established with reference to God's salvific intervention in Jesus Christ. Rather, what is at issue is a radical change of meaning (*Bedeutungswandel*), which necessarily requires a particular pre-understanding of love. In other words, although the sentence "God is love" (1 Joh 4:8) can indeed only be comprehended with reference to God's being and action, it is imperative to clarify the "essential meaning" (*wesentliche Bedeutung*) of the term love independently of its specifically Christological use.[97]

However, as far as Jüngel is concerned, one is tempted to ask why exactly *this* particular – i.e. the elaborate but 'general' picture of love he paints in this essay – is supposed to be the indispensable precondition for understanding the specifically Christian *ἀγάπη*. For is the pre-Christian understanding of love, beautifully outlined by Jüngel, the result of a phenomenological analysis of the *prevailing* (secular?) linguistic practice? Or is it a highly specific notion of love that is to a certain degree already informed by Christian thought? Jüngel's answers to these questions remain

[94] Compare for instance Barth's discussion about the meaning of 'love' in *KD* II/1, 259f with *KD* IV/2, 825-853. Although Barth does not jettison the basic ideas of his theocentric theology, there is nonetheless a certain shift of emphasis. For instance, in *KD* IV/2, he pays much more attention to the postlapsarian pre-understanding of love (agapē *and* eros), even though the christological and trinitarian understanding eventually alters its meaning radically so that no synthesis is possible.
[95] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 430-453.
[96] Ibid., 434.
[97] Ibid.

ambiguous.[98] He admits that the idea of love set out in the preceding chapters of *God as the mystery of the world* was developed within a theological context but nonetheless lays claim to *general evidence*. Formally, love is defined "als Ereignis einer inmitten noch so grosser und mit Recht noch so grosser Selbstbezogenheit immer noch grösseren Selbstlosigkeit", and materially as „die sich ereignende Einheit von Leben und Tod zugunsten des Lebens".[99] The following analysis Jüngel views as a development of these basic statements. But are these definitions not already highly theological? Are they not just more *abstract* formulas which are supposed to sum up the very kernel of the Gospel *narratives*? If that is really the case, what does the aforementioned change of meaning (*Bedeutungswandel*) consist in? As far as this last question is concerned, Jüngel seems – in spite of certain reservations – to repeat the traditional Protestant dichotomy between *eros* and *agapē*. For the only evident shift of meaning which occurs in the course of his enquiry (i.e. in § 20) is that from need-love to gift-love and from a *reciprocal* understanding of love to a *non*-reciprocal one.[100]

In any case, what is required is an *asymmetrical reciprocity* between the non-Christian pre-understanding of a term and its theological meaning. On the one hand, the latter meaning is inextricably intertwined with and to a certain extent based on the former meaning. On the other hand, the newly acquired (narrative) meaning henceforth serves as the ultimate standard by which all 'further uses' of this word must be judged. This leads to the second aspect mentioned above, the issue of how this transformative reintegration into everyday language is to be thought of.

b) It seems that despite the narrative and self-involving character of meaning, a transformative reintegration is a priori excluded. On the *diachronic* level, Barth fails to locate the narrator himself in a narrative. His notion of *re*-telling the Gospel narratives comes close to an *identical repetition*. According to him, the narrative meaning of a particular term is not a generally observable 'fact' but requires a perspectival disclosure which can only be accomplished by God himself. But the problem is that he treats narratives almost like 'propositions' insofar as his idea of self-involvement has a very intellectualist character. Thus the *appropriation* of a narrative basically makes the narrators *conscientes*.[101] At least on this hermeneutical level, Barth shows

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[98] A he himself points out, his reflections are informed by J. Pieper's, *Über die Liebe*.

[99] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 434.

[100] Ibid., 435-437. To be sure, Jüngel's formal definition of love as 'inmitten noch so grosser und mit Recht noch so grosser Selbstbezogenheit immer noch grösseren Selbstlosigkeit' is supposed to *transcend* the traditional dichotomy between *eros* and *agapē*. As he explicitly points out, love without some kind of self-referentiality would be a distortion of love 'from above'. Likewise, love in which selflessness does not prevail over self-referentiality would be a distortion 'from below'. In the first case, the nature of love is threatened by a moral castration, i.e. it is forgotten that love is a phenomenon of being rather than a moral imperative. In the second case, there is the danger of sexually violating the nature of love since it is disregarded that love transforms the dimension of willing, insofar as the loving 'I' must be willing to subordinate his willing to the beloved 'Thou', ibid., 436f, fn 15.

[101] They are those who "know themselves […] those who do not only reflect on it but think it themselves"; they "think it from inner impulse and necessity […] appropriation means … the contemporaneity, homogeneity and indirect identification of the reader and hearer of Scripture with the witness of revelation" (*KD* I/2, 826). What matters is "our share in the great *acts of God* in his *revelation*" (KD I/2, 794).

little interest in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the biblical text. However, all evaluative endeavours that aim at developing an appropriate understanding of *agapē* for the present time, must perforce take into account this vast historical material. Furthermore, the insight that the retelling of the story is fundamentally *creative*, demands interpretative criteria which cannot compete with the text's status as the final arbiter. On the *synchronic* level, the question arises of how the biblical paradigm of *agapē* can be linguistically brought to bear on the wide variety of human cultural phenomena. This requires a kind of 'extension' of the Christian narrative; a project which is undertaken in *KD* IV and taken up by the Yale school in connection with Lindbeck's key term *intratextuality*.[102]

c) Syntactics

As Moxter points out, Barth's conception of revelation also entails a *syntactic* aspect, which is related to (one of) the central term(s) of his theology: the *covenant*. It is the covenant that interconnects the Old with the New Testament.[103] In the Old Testament, the election of the people of Israel (*KD* I/2, 245), "the king, the priest, the law, sacrifice, the tabernacle, the temple, the holy land: all of them have to be acknowledged as a coherent circle of signs *pointing to a common centre*" (*KD* I/2, 247, my emphasis). According to Moxter, what links these signs up and gives them continuity, is there respective difference to this centre which is never directly given but eludes immediate grasp. This difference constitutes the condition under which a sign can be added to another one. God's sovereignty and superior freedom as regards all signs manifests itself exactly in the fact that signs always occur in a series of signs, i.e. every sign points beyond itself to other signs (*KD* I/2, 245; II/1, 57). Signs do not signify God by virtue of an inherent quality, but because they are being *used* theologically. God constitutes signs *as* signs by negating them through other signs.[104]

With the appearance of Christ, however, the world of the Old Testament signs disappears in a flash, or is at least "prolonged in the New Testament Church by only a small number of new signs, which merely indicate, as it were, the indispensability of the signs and also their continuity with the ancient sign-world" (*KD* I/2, 247). The sign-world of the Old Testament is superseded by the Church, with its apostles, its *kerygma*, baptism and the Lord's supper, "for that is really all there is to be said about the Church and its visibility" (*KD* I/2, 247). Yet it is precisely this transition from the sign-world of the Old to that of the New Testament which manifests a number of idiosyncrasies in the 'syntactic order' of signs.

a) Barth's syntactics of the signs of revelation has a *hierarchical* character. First, at the top of this hierarchy stands the *human* nature of Christ. More precisely, the human being Jesus of Nazareth is a sign-vehicle, signifying (a) divine meaning(s). The second plane comprises the witness of the apostles and prophets as recorded in Scripture. Although Barth calls Scripture a sign too (*KD* I/1, 275), it is on a higher

[102] But see J. Milbank's critique in *Theology and Social Theory*, 382ff.
[103] „Jesus Christus ist Gott, Gott als Mensch und so „Gott mit uns" Menschen, Gott im Werk der *Versöhnung* aber ist die *Erfüllung* des *Bundes* zwischen Gott und Mensch" (*KD* IV/1, 22).
[104] M. Moxter, *Kultur als Lebenswelt*, 261.

level as mere *interpretations* of the Bible. That is to say, Scripture shows a *representative closeness* to what it witnesses to which differs *qualitatively* from all further interpretations (*KD* I/2, 524, 607). This also drives a wedge between the original *interpreters*, i.e. the apostles and prophets, and all further interpreters, whose interpretative endeavours are based on the work of the apostles and prophets (*KD* I/2, 604f). This leads to the third level, which comprises interpretations of Scripture produced after the apostolic period, such as ecclesiastical confessions, to which Barth pays particular attention. Provided one keeps in mind the derivative character of all linguistic third-level sedimentations produced by the Church throughout the centuries, it is tenable to say that they form part of the objective revelation of Jesus Christ (*KD* I/2, 247f). *Oral proclamation*, however, occupies a special place on this third level, since it leads to a new kind of immediacy (see chapter B) of part II).

To put this the other way round, any interpretation of Scripture points to the original witness of the apostles and evangelists, which is itself a pointer, pointing backwards to the primary sign (or primary sacrament) Jesus Christ (*KD* I/1, 277f). Historically, the sign Jesus Christ is preceded by the signs of the Old Testament, but theologically the Christ-sign nonetheless constitutes the condition of possibility for all other signs to take on a revelatory meaning. Accordingly, Barth is not primarily interested in the syntactic order of signs but rather focuses on the relation of the *many* signs to the *one* 'sign' Jesus Christ. For as we have seen, the many signs form "a coherent circle pointing to a *common centre*" (*KD* I/2, 247, emphasis mine).[105] Yet neither on the level of *langue* nor on the level of *parole* can *one* sign be *directly* related to *all* other signs. According to Saussure, for instance, meaning is conceived of in terms of the semantic value a concept has within the whole system of language. These semantic values form a network of structural relations so that meaning is constituted by the differences and oppositions between them.[106] Only in this *indirect* sense is it tenable to say that one sign is related to all other signs. But this is evidently not what Barth has in mind, for the image of the circle and its centre would not be an apt illustration of Saussure's understanding of meaning.

It follows from this that the 'sign' Jesus Christ cannot be regarded as simply *a* sign among other signs. Rather, it must be seen as a sort of hub around which everything revolves, as the meaning-bestowing centre in the light of which all signs take on new meanings. This leads even further away from what I called a 'literal understanding' of divine speech and points to issues that will be discussed in part III. Jüngel calls this 'hermeneutical hub' *ground metaphor* (*Grundmetapher*), which he understands as the identification of the risen Christ with the crucified human being Jesus of Nazareth.[107] Far from being just one sign among other signs, this ground metaphor leads to "*an experience with experience*"[108], i.e. it brings about a *renewal*

[105] It is certainly legitimate to read this statement christologically, even if Barth does not explicitly identify the centre with Christ.
[106] F. de Saussure, *Course de linguistique générale*, 158-169.
[107] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 152.
[108] Ibid., 156.

and *extension* of our familiar (linguistically mediated) world.[109] Metaphors (and parables) are thus an "absolutely new way of dealing with what exists …".[110]

b) The transition from the sign-world of the Old to that of the New Testament is concomitant with a *quantitative decrease* of signs. The sign-world of the Old Testament "is prolonged in the New Testament Church by only a *small number* of new signs, which merely indicate, as it were, the *indispensability of the signs* and also their continuity with the ancient sign-world" (KD I/2 247, italics mine). Yet it seems advisable to interpret this statement in a descriptive, rather than normative sense. To be sure, it cannot be denied that the New Testament in many respects lacks the richness and comprehensiveness of the Old Testament. For instance, the Old Testament undoubtedly encompasses a wider variety of literary genres than the New Testament. Moreover, compared to Christianity's impact on the Roman Empire in the first centuries, there is a much more radical permeation of the socio-cultural sphere in Israel. This is mainly due to the fact that the Old Testament covers a much longer period of history than the New Testament – which also accounts for the greater development of the synchronic level mentioned above. Yet this seeming impoverishment as regards linguistic and cultural sedimentation, and the relatively early completion of the New Testament canon in the fourth century at the same time entails a positive hermeneutical potential which is absent from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, diversity is mainly a diachronic matter, i.e. it occurs primarily throughout the different stages of the history of Israel and not so much synchronically. Furthermore, the universal, trans-ethnical dimension of the Old Testament notion of salvation, though undoubtedly an ingredient of Old Testament faith, is basically something that is hoped for but only marginally realised in the time up until the appearance of Christ. The New Testament however, allows for diachronic *and* synchronic diversity. First, it is a collection of writings that witnesses to the (non-arbitrary) plurality of different understandings of faith which was right from the beginning characteristic of the Christian tradition. For instance, the Church adopted four divergent accounts of the life of Jesus Christ; certainly not because the Church was not aware of the different theological outlooks which governed their authors, but rather because this linguistic dissemination of the *Logos* was considered an *essential part* of Christianity. Secondly, the New Testament not only gives an account of different traditions within the one tradition but exhibits *itself* a high degree of transferability, i.e. it can be re-contextualised in ever new times and places, precisely *because* of its fragmentary character. Put differently, the New Testament does not in the first place provide direction and guidelines for concrete aspects of human life such as politics, family, sexuality, etc., as the Old Testament does, but only supplies the basic framework within which these issues can be tackled. Consequently, the quantitatively impoverished sign-world of the New Testament at the same time serves at the basis for a new generation of signs which by far *exceeds* that of the Old Testament qualitatively (Jesus Christ) and quantitatively

[109] Ibid., 154, 157.

[110] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 396. In Jüngel, the use of metaphor is closely connected with the notion of *orality*, *event*, *address*, *innovation* and *renewal*, and seems therefore to be primarily a phenomenon on the level of *parole*, cf. E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 140, 143, 145, 155.

(universalism). It is the second aspect which remains underdeveloped in Barth. For him, the reduced sign-world of the New Testament merely indicates the "indispensability of the signs" (*KD* I/2, 247): "Into the whole ancient sign-world steps the *Church* with its apostles and its kerygma, with baptism and the Lord's supper; for that is really all there is to be said about the Church and its visibility" (ibid).

B) A 'top-down' approach to divine speech

a) The sender

As already indicated, I understand 'concrete acts of interpretation' in terms of the formula *s interprets (or sets) x as y to a in the context c*. The aim of the sender (and the addressee) is thereby the termination of the chain of interpretation, which may lead to an action. In this chapter, the focus shall be on the '*as*' in the formula *s interprets (or sets) x as y.*

Since this is not in the first place an essay on text hermeneutics but on 'world-interpretation', as it were, the object of interpretation *x* is *not* to be identified with the biblical text. Rather, as already outlined above, *x* is a variable standing for a particular entity in the world. But as it is primarily the Christian narratives that shape the 'topography' of the Christian perspective on the world, it is also those narratives which inform the sender's (often unconscious) interpretative choices, that which makes him or her interpret *x* as *y* rather than *z* (provided one abstracts from the variability of all the other factors, namely *s*, *a* and *c*). In other words, Scripture comes into play in the *as-structure* of the interpretative act. There is an enormously complex process of interpretation mediating between the biblical text and statements of the kind *x* is *y* that cannot be analysed in detail in this essay. Hence a few hints must suffice.

Strictly speaking, the Christian narratives fulfil *two different* yet interconnected hermeneutical functions in such acts of interpretation. First, one has to keep in mind that it is never simply an individual interpreter that establishes a link between the Christian narratives and a particular *x*. Rather, the most basic interpretative practices always have a communal character and concern the very *identity* of a community. Yet this identity is *itself* the result of an internalisation of the Christian narratives. That is to say, 'before'[111] any concrete *x* is interpreted, the biblical narratives "constitute the *identity* of the community that tells and retells the story, and they constitute it as a narrative identity".[112] Even if one interprets this identity as a(n) (non-Cartesian and non-physicalist) *ipse-identity* which requires the subject/community to continually reinterpret and refigure itself through the narratives which it seeks to appropriate, there is nonetheless a certain permanence and continuity(-in-discontinuity) resulting from the ongoing process of internalisation.[113] On this level, a tentative comparison with Abel's interpretation$_1$ seems tenable. One could thus say that Scripture constitutes and shapes the interpretative *practice* of a community on its

[111] What is at stake here is not a temporal, but a *hermeneutical* succession.
[112] P. Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 241, emphasis mine.
[113] M.I. Wallace, *Introduction to Figuring the Sacred*, 13.

most basic level, limited by a specific interpretative *horizon*. Once again, what is at stake here is not the narrow, 'hermeneutical' understanding of interpretation such as scriptural interpretation, i.e. that which Abel calls *appropriating-construing interpretations*$_3$ (*aneignend-deutend*). Rather, the internalisation of Scripture by the community builds up the most fundamental categories of interpretation which are always already entailed in *every* act of interpretation and in *every* perception of the world. Here too, I have touched upon questions that will be further discussed in part III.

On the other hand, Scripture comes into play a second time in concrete acts of interpretation in which *s* interprets (or sets) *x* as *y*. For according to Barth, divine speech occurs in the context of proclamation, i.e. a human sender talks about a particular *x* on the basis of a pericope taken from *Scripture*. Once again, it may seem problematic to emphasise so much that Church proclamation makes statements about *concrete xs* in the world. This is of course not the only, let alone the most plausible way of understanding the function of Church proclamation. Yet part II of this essay tries to take Barth at his word when he says that God always speaks a *concretissimum*, that he always says something *specific* to each addressee (*KD* I/1, 145).

However, these concrete acts of interpretation cannot be separated from the level of interpretation$_1$ discussed in the preceding paragraph. Rather, the most basic interpretative categories on the level of interpretatition$_1$ inform and shape all concrete acts of interpretation, even if they are mediated ('a second time', as it were) by scriptural exegesis – as in the case of Church proclamation. But there is of course a certain reciprocity between these two levels insofar as text interpretation can very well alter and refigure the level of interpretation$_1$. But in order for this to happen, a new and innovative interpretation must repeatedly occur and/or have a lasting effect on the interpretative community which the interpreter is part of.

What is at stake here is the notion of pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) in text-interpretation and the perennial hermeneutical question of how a text can be validly and adequately interpreted. However, the above account of the twofold use of the biblical text does not confusedly suggest that *Scripture* is the *only* factor which constitutes the pre-understanding of *Scripture* – as it may seem at first glance. Rather, the process of internalising the Christian narratives on the level of interpretation$_1$ is of course governed by elements that are *not* derived from Scripture itself. The Church prior to the Reformation rightly stressed that *Scripture* and *Tradition* form an inseparable whole. Nonetheless, the above remarks can be read as an attempt to understand the doctrine that Scripture interprets itself (*sui ipsius interpres*) – though it clearly deviates from the 'classically' Protestant view on this issue.

In what follows, I shall analyse the second part of § 21 of the *Prolegomena* where Barth expounds his theological hermeneutics. Before that I shall give a brief overview of some hermeneutical theories that might help better understand Barth's hermeneutics. It is important to keep in mind the overall structure of this chapter: In the following reflections the focus will be on (the pragmatic aspects of) *communication*; more precisely, on the *en*coding of the message by the *sender*. Moreover, as outlined above, I shall pay particular attention to the 'as-structure' in the formula '*s* interprets *x* as *y*'.

Barth and contemporary hermeneutics

The more determined textual meaning is, the less interpretation depends on the context, the interpretative strategies and the aim(s) of its interpreter(s) – and vice versa. Moreover, if it is held that the 'text itself' is saturated with meaning, its extraction is normally thought of as mediated by some kind of *method*, i.e. by means of a rational, objective, neutral and publicly controllable procedure. Yet, despite this public character, access to the true meaning of the text is dependent on the mastery of this method and thus remains the privilege of a small group of experts. The still prevailing dominance of the historical-critical method in many theological departments – which emerged relatively unscathed from post-modern and pragmatist challenges – is a case in point.[114] Interestingly, fundamentalist movements in the US, which reacted against these guilds of biblical critics remained within a similar hermeneutical framework. By appealing to the common sense of the people and their ability to understand the plain sense of Scripture without the help of experts, they simply democratised the process of interpretation.[115] In other words, the expert is replaced by the masses and the methodically controlled procedure by common sense and the alleged self-evidence of textual meaning. However, fundamentalism and biblical criticism are both Enlightenment ideologies insofar as they centre on the notion of a rational individual who is considered capable of interpreting the biblical text truthfully without initiation into a specific community and its corresponding interpretative practice.[116]

Yet some scholars associated with communitarian thought make the opposite mistake by reducing biblical interpretation to a kind of practical reasoning (*phronesis*) that *only* concerns directly interpersonal matters.[117] They thereby ignore the diachronic and synchronic complexity of text-interpretation. On the *diachronic* level, enquiry into a tradition's *Wirkungsgeschichte* renders historical research not less but *more* important.[118] Although it is no longer the historian's aim to establish the text's one and only true meaning hidden in the past, knowledge of its *Wirkungsgeschichte* is indispensable for every interpretative community. The fundamental difference between the classical historical-critical scholar and the theologically informed historian can be characterised as follows: the former seeks to overcome the perspectivity of every human act of interpretation by applying an allegedly objective and neutral method. His aim is to arrive at indisputable historical facts that can/must be accepted by everybody, wholly independent of a person's world view. The latter, by contrast, fully accepts the inevitably perspectival character of his community's basic presuppositions ($\approx$ interpretation$_1$) but tries to heighten his tradition's *self-awareness*. He investigates and critically evaluates the relationship between the biblical text and the cultural, social and political changes it gave rise to throughout the centuries. It goes

[114] Cf. J. Zumstein, *Rettet die Bibel*, 67ff.
[115] Hatch, *The Democratisation of American Christianity*, 179ff.
[116] Cf. S. Hauerwas, *Unleashing Scripture*, 35.
[117] See S.E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 178-206.
[118] Fowl does emphasise the importance of *Wirkungsgeschichte* (ibid., 128-160), but does not pay attention enough to the notion of a specifically *theological* discipline of history.

without saying that not all of his insights will be immediately relevant to contemporary processes of decision-making. In any case, the theologically informed historian is as much an *expert* as the classical historical-critical scholar, even if his intellectual equipment differs significantly from that of the allegedly 'neutral' historian.

So far as the *synchronic* level is concerned, the interpreter faces a wide variety of different questions today. Stephen Fowl's understanding of practical reasoning (*phronesis*), for instance, is far too narrow and would not be suitable to tackle political, social or scientific issues. That is to say, his use of the term *phronesis* may rightly highlight the perspectival, non-foundationalist and purpose-oriented character of underdetermined interpretation, as well as the need for the interpreter to acquire an interpretative *hexis* by repeated practice.[119] However, there is very little room for *differentiation*.[120] Of course, if the focus is on the common, basic presuppositions (≈ interpretation$_1$), it is justified to speak of one 'single' *phronesis*. Yet it would be fallacious to believe that there is only *one* field of activity that corresponds to this *one* interpretative perspective. Rather, on the diachronic as well as on the synchronic level, a tradition requires a great number of different types of expertise and authority.[121]

Let us now look at these processes of interpretation in greater detail. Frege's well-known distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*) highlights two of the dominant hermeneutical tendencies of modernity. Sense calls attention to the authorial intention, to that which the author had in mind, whereas reference concerns the external objects in the world, to that about which the author says something. J. Barr notes the corresponding trend in biblical studies which focused on the one hand on the biblical text as a manifestation of mental representations, and on the results of historical reconstructions of the 'real events' on the other.[122]

Authorial intention: E.D. Hirsch

E.D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation*, published in 1967, is a good example of a hermeneutics in which the ideal of scientific rigidity is approached on the basis of authorial intention.[123] His hermeneutic theory is developed by analogy with the methodological apparatus of the natural sciences. It is an attempt, as it were, at transferring Popper's theory of falsification to textual interpretation. As soon as we manage to form hypotheses about an author's meaning or intention, these can be subjected to rigorous testing. This enables us to draw probability judgments depending on the established degree of evidence. It is thus possible to reach "objective conclu-

[119] Ibid., 56-61, 154-160, 190ff.
[120] I cannot pursue this question here any further, but part of the problem seems to be that Aristotle's highly specific, namely *ethical* use of the term *phronesis* (see Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.5) has been used as a general category for interpretation without the necessary modifications that would allow for differentiation *within* the *phronesis* paradigm. The use of Aristotle's *phronesis* for text hermeneutics goes back to H.-G. Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*, 295ff.
[121] Needless to say that the more one emphasises differentiation and the need for different types of authority, the less plausible it becomes to identify any of these kinds of authority with Church proclamation.
[122] J. Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World*, 175.
[123] E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*. All page numbers in brackets refer to this work.

sions" (206). In other words, Hirsch collapses the Diltheyan distinction between explanation and understanding, natural and human sciences, at the expense of *understanding*. He postulates the existence of fully determined verbal meanings in texts which he defines as "*willed type[s]*" (49). According to him, the determinacy of meaning cannot be maintained simply by virtue of particular groupings of signs. For even long and complex word sequences can still enter various contexts and situations and are thus never fully saturated with meaning. This is borne out by the fact that even competent and intelligent interpreters quite often disagree substantially about the meaning of a text. But if syntactics is incapable of safeguarding the self-identity and univocity of verbal meaning, there must be "some other discriminating force …" (47). This force Hirsch finds in the *will* of the author. It is only authorial intention which overcomes equivocity, as without it, it would be impossible to distinguish between what the author *really* tries to express by a word sequence and what he *could have* meant by it. Accordingly, whenever we seek to re-construe the meaning of an author's discourse, there is no interpretative freedom at all. As the meaning of his discourse is the meaning he intends to convey, "we are completely subservient to his will …" (142). Whereas the word 'willed' stands for the indispensability of a conscious intending meaning, the term 'type' implies two things (49-51): first, it is an entity with clear boundaries, which unambiguously demarcate what belongs to it and what does not. Hirsch prefers the term 'type' to that of 'class', as the latter is normally thought of as an array of concrete instances, whereas the former can be *entirely* represented in a single instance. Determinacy is thus interpreted in terms of self-identity, which Hirsch calls the "minimum requirement for shareability" (45). This leads to a second important feature of a type: its *iterability*. A type can be represented by an indefinite number of instances. Thus Hirsch's understanding of verbal meaning as type is characterised by determinacy and shareability: "*Verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs*" (31, italics mine).

Drawing on the nineteenth century philologist Philip August Boeckh, Hirsch further differentiates between verbal meaning and *significance*. Whereas verbal meaning, characterised above as 'willed type', is a property of the text, i.e., 'meaning-*in*', significance is always 'meaning-*to*'. That is to say, significance refers to the relationship between someone's verbal meaning and something else, something outside it. It follows that a text's verbal meaning can in principle be applied to an indefinite number of state of affairs in past and present. However, each application is at the same time governed by the text's verbal meaning. Hirsch's radical distinction between meaning and its application flies in the face of Gadamer's hermeneutics, where the three moments of understanding (*Verstehen*), interpretation (*Auslegung*) and application (*Anwendung*) in the 'hermeneutical situation' are inseparable.[124] Indeed, even though he admits that the theory of semantic autonomy "has long been victorious" (3), his own approach is designed as a meta-critique of the tradition initiated by Hei-

[124] H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 290-295.

degger and elaborated by Gadamer (2, 245-264). Hirsch aims at a revival of some of the basic insights of romantic hermeneutics, though these are now interpreted in terms of Husserlian intentionality (217ff). The question of how a theory of meaning can do justice to the determinacy of meaning on the one hand, and the obvious variability of any contingent act of consciousness on the other, is answered by resorting to Husserl's distinction between the intentional act and the object-as-intended (*noema*).[125] Different "intentional acts (on different occasions)" intend "an identical intentional object", whereas verbal meaning is understood as a special kind of intentional object (218).

The difference between verbal meaning and significance re-occurs in Hirsch's differentiation between *commentary*, *interpretation* and *criticism*. Commentary is a summary term for all essays written about texts. Within this general class, Hirsch distinguishes between interpretation, which is concerned with meaning, and criticism, which is a commentary about significance. This distinction does not coincide with different genres as every (really existing) "textual commentary is a mixture of interpretation and criticism, though usually a choice has been made as to which goal is to receive the main emphasis" (140). He even goes so far as to say that in practice, our understanding of a text is *always* related to something else. Under normal circumstances, the act of construing verbal meaning cannot be isolated from the act of relating it to external objects. Thus as far as concrete texts are concerned, the difference between criticism and interpretation seems to be one of degree. Finally, the above distinctions correspond to two different *interpretative faculties*. By *understanding*, Hirsch means the ability to perceive and construe the author's verbal meaning, whereas *judgment* refers to the capability of combining a meaning with either criteria of value or any other entity (143).

External reference: W. Wrede

Wrede's famous essay, *The task and method of New Testament theology*, exemplifies a hermeneutics of the second type, which tries to reconstruct the 'historical facts'.[126] According to him, already the term 'New Testament theology' is misplaced, as the New Testament is more concerned with 'religion' than with *Christian* theology. That is to say, Wrede's ideal is to approach the New Testament from a (supposedly) neutral, external perspective. He therefore suggests calling his project "history of early Christian religion and theology" (116). Consequently, the scope of this historical investigation can no longer be confined to the New Testament itself, but must comprise the non-canonical Christian texts as well. For New Testament theology to be a scientific undertaking, it has to be based on pure historical research and pursue the ideal of an utterly disinterested understanding of knowledge (70). This leads to a radical separation between dogmatics and biblical studies and rises the latter to the level of a 'first theology', whose objective and unbiased results can then be further processed by dogmatic theology and other disciplines. Wrede thus falls into the cate-

[125] Cf. *Staten*, Wittgenstein and Derrida, 139ff.
[126] W. Wrede, *The task and method of New Testament theology*. All the page numbers in brackets refer to this work.

gory of nineteenth century liberal theology which was so vigorously attacked by Barth after his 'turn' in 1915.[127]

According to Wrede, New Testament theology must be purged of dogmatics, as facts speak for themselves: first, dogmatics cannot "*correct* the facts", second, it cannot help us "to *see* the facts correctly", and thirdly, it fails to *legitimise* them, because facts need no legitimisation as they are self-evident (69, italics mine). Wrede's is thus a *positivistic realism* which is diametrically opposed to Barth's theological thought. For Barth, the objective and the subjective aspects of human interpretative acts, i.e. *that which* is interpreted as well as *how* or *as what* it is interpreted are both divinely effected and lead to a Trinitarian hermeneutics.[128] This also accounts for his well-known lack of interest in – rather than rejection of – the historical-critical approach in theology (cf. *Röm* II, XVIff).

However, a closer look reveals that it is far from clear what the term 'fact' actually refers to in Wrede's essay so that one should not too quickly brand him as a proponent of an outdated nineteenth-century historicism. Unlike Hirsch, he is not interested in authorial intention (86). At the same time he seems to distance himself from the mere reconstruction of external events as well: "Biblical theology has to investigate something from given documents – it is not an external thing, still *something intellectual*" (69, italics mine). Elsewhere he admits "that we are […] generally in the dark about *external events*" (105). At times, Wrede seems close to a sort of *phenomenology of religion*. This is borne out by his distinction between a *type* and its *variants*, which is not to be confused with Hirsch's use of the (former) term. Interpreting Wrede's essay as favourably as possible, one could say that he envisages the early Christian community to be shaped by certain linguistic 'key images'. On this view, a 'type' would serve as a point of crystallisation for further linguistic imagery – its 'variants' in Wrede's idiom.[129]

A further consequence of Wrede's approach is that the canon, a group of authoritative texts chosen according to internal criteria, loses its plausibility. The specifically Christian interest in whether a piece of writing is a truthful testimony to the divine revelation in Jesus Christ gives way to the question of the chronological order of early Christian writings.

Pragmatic insights: S. Fish

Post-structuralist and post-critical hermeneutics dismantles the illusion of an atemporal and contextless rationality and points to the interdependence of methods and their underlying world views. Hence the focus is on patterns of interpretation embodied by communities and the prespectival, political and ideological character of all hermeneutic approaches. The hitherto dominating notions of authorial intention and external reference are abandoned or at least undergo significant modifications. Nor is meaning simply conceived of in terms of the 'semantic autonomy' of the text. Rather, it is believed that meaning remains to a large extent dependent on the inter-

[127] Cf. B. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 129ff.
[128] K. Barth, *Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie*, 381ff.
[129] However, such an interpretation certainly goes beyond the actual intellectual horizon of the author.

preter and his community, the context, and the interpretative aim governing the act of interpretation.

Stanley Fish's theory of interpretation as developed in *Is There a Text in This Class?* revolves around the notion of *interpretative communities*.[130] What stands at the centre of attention is not a method by means of which the meaning of the text can be extracted but the *effect* a particular text has upon its reader. Accordingly, Fish is not interested in the question of what a sentence *means*, but rather what it *does* (to the reader) (25). Meaning is not a property which inheres in the text itself but must be thought of as an event, "something that is happening between the words and in the reader's mind …" (28). The form of the reader's experience, the formal units of the text and the structure of intention are only different perspectives on the same *interpretative act*. Consequently, there is no isolatable *interpretandum* independent of or prior to the act of interpretation. Any attempt at pointing to unchangeable patterns in texts fails, since these patterns are contingent on the procedures by means of which they are being interpreted. In other words, these patterns are never simply observable facts but are themselves constituted by the interpretative act (165).

Yet the question arises as to how this approach can account for the fact that, first, the same reader will perform differently when reading two different 'texts', and secondly, different readers will perform similarly when reading the same 'text'. However, according to Fish, neither of these cases compels us to resort to the notion of a text that is independent of and prior to the interpretative act. Rather, stability as well as variety can be explained in terms of *interpretative strategies* (167f). If an interpreter reads two 'different' literary works differently, this is not because they possess different formal structures which give rise to different interpretative strategies but because the interpreter's "predisposition to execute different interpretive strategies will *produce* different formal structures" (169). In other words, interpretative strategies are not applied after reading but rather are *the shape of reading*. Consequently, they *constitute* the text rather than arise from them.

However, even if one follows Fish's account closely, it cannot be denied that the assignment of an interpretative strategy to a particular 'text' or genre is based on the 'text'. Although the interpretative strategy is text-constitutive, it is certain indices *in* the text which govern the interpreter's selection. As Fish himself puts it, when I read *Lycidas*, I make right from the beginning two decisions, namely that this work is a pastoral and that it was written by Milton; and these decisions govern the whole act of interpretation. Yet these pieces of information are taken *from* the text – even if they are strictly speaking interpretations as well. It might well be that the interpretative strategy is the hermeneutically dominant factor in text-interpretation. Nonetheless, a non-arbitrary assignment of a strategy to a text or a genre requires that this text or genre is identifiable. As a result, the 'text' – even if its meaning is indeed

[130] S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class*, pp. 303ff. All page references in brackets refer to Fish's work.

highly underdetermined and only emerges in the process of interpretation – hermeneutically *precedes* the act of reading.[131]

Fish then turns to the second question raised above and tries to explain why different readers may perform the same interpretative strategy when faced with the 'same' text. The answer is: because they belong to the same *interpretative community*, i.e. they belong to a group of people who share the same interpretative strategies. The notion of interpretative community also accounts for the "regularity with which a single reader will employ different interpretive strategies and thus make different texts …" (171). The answer to this question is: he belongs to *different* interpretative strategies. This is also the reason why there can be disagreement on the interpretation of a 'text': not because of the stability of the text, but because of the relative stability of interpretative communities.

It follows from this that the terms *interpretative community* and *interpretative strategy* are used in different ways. First, an interpretative strategy can be text- or genre-dependent. Thus the fact that I realise that *Lycidas* is a pastoral and written by Milton predisposes me to read it in a particular way, i.e. guided by a particular interpretative strategy. Secondly, interpretative strategies can differ even if the 'text' remains the same. That is to say, different people read the same text differently because they follow different interpretative strategies. Thirdly, an individual interpreter belongs simultaneously to various interpretative communities (and will hence adopt different interpretative strategies) as regards one and the same text. In other words, the adoption of an interpretative strategy can be context-dependent. Furthermore, the various interpretative communities the interpreter belongs to may be incompatible with each other so that he has to negotiate between conflicting criteria.[132]

Accordingly, interpretative strategies differ from one interpretative community to another, and there are no criteria by means of which they can be assessed. Thus there cannot be a universal consensus on which norms are the right ones. Yet this neither leads to relativism nor solipsism. It does not lead to *relativism* since no one can take a god's-eye view and leave behind or transcend any interpretative presuppositions. As Fish puts it, "relativism is a position one can entertain, [but] it is not a position one can occupy. No one can *be* a relativist …" (319). In other words, everybody always already holds, consciously or unconsciously, certain beliefs and norms so that "there is never a moment when one believes nothing …" (ibid). Accordingly, the fear that a person could lack any basis for his actions is groundless, since whoever acts, acts in a particular way, and whoever acts in a particular way, has certain presuppositions. That is to say, even in a world of differing and conflicting norms and values, the individual is always already situated in a particular interpretative community. Furthermore, as Fish points out, his approach does not lead to *solipsism* since interpretative strategies are adopted and learned from the *communities* which the individual interpreter is part of. The interpreter thus only appropriates and internalises pre-

[131] This is not to say that there is only one rule according to which text/genres and interpretative strategies can be related to each other. However, in order to avoid utter arbitrariness, there must be some kind of stability for specific interpreters or communities.
[132] S. Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 30f.

given values and norms of which he is not himself the origin. Accordingly, interpreters must be regarded as "extensions of an institutional community" and do not act as individuals (321).

Open and closed texts: U. Eco

Fish's focus on interpretative strategies results in a certain disregard for different *genres* of texts. Eco, by contrast, views the process of text interpretation in terms of a dialectic relationship between text, author and interpreter.[133] Unlike Fish, he emphasises that a text does constitute a network of interpretative constraints, even if the degree of this guidance as well as the interpretative labour required to decode it, varies greatly with the genre into which it falls. Eco thus distinguishes between *closed* and *open* texts.

Closed texts are aimed at a clearly defined empirical reader and try to evoke an equally clear and unambiguous response. Yet it is exactly this type of text which is open to aberrant interpretations: "A text so immoderately 'open' to every possible interpretation will be called a *closed* one".[134] Texts which fall into this class are predictable insofar as every expectation elicited is followed by a corresponding satisfaction. Their narrative structure follows a fixed pattern with little variation which can be analysed relatively easily.[135] Yet problems arise if the addressee is not the 'average reader' the text was designed for by the author. That is to say, if the text is read by people with other interpretative presuppositions and a different background knowledge, misinterpretations are unavoidable.

Open texts, however, do not allow for such an interpretative freedom: "You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it".[136] That is to say, open texts are, precisely *because* of their openness, more restrictive and do not allow for whatever interpretation. In other words, the more 'open' a text is, the more determined are the requirements the model reader should meet; and one could add, the *more demanding* is the interpretative labour to appropriately decode the text. Eco even goes so far as to say that the profile of a good reader of open texts can be *extrapolated from the text itself*. According to him, "the pragmatic process of interpretation is not an empirical accident independent of the text *qua* text, but is a structural element of its generative process".[137] Consequently, if an open text is read by an unsuitable and incompetent interpreter, it becomes *another text*. For instance, nobody can be hindered from reading Kafka's *Trial* as a trivial criminal novel, but one then grossly misreads this work.

Despite obvious and considerable differences between Fish's and Eco's approach, these two theories do not need be viewed as diametrically opposed. Even if this is not fully acknowledged by the author, Fish does (implicitly) allow for the idea that textual signals help the reader select the appropriate interpretative strategy. But he does

[133] U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader*.
[134] Ibid., 8.
[135] Cf. ibid., 146f, 156-159.
[136] Ibid., 9.
[137] Ibid.

not use the term interpretative strategy univocally, i.e. there is not *always* a fixed relationship between a particular genre and an interpretative strategy. That is why one and the same text can be interpreted by means of different strategies.

As for Eco's statement that the model reader of an open text can be extrapolated *from the text itself*, one could argue – along with Fish – that this is only possible if one adopts specific reading habits. Eco accepts the prevailing hierarchy of interpreters insofar as he considers readers which read Kafka's *Trial* not just as a trivial criminal novel as the more appropriate ones. It follows from this that his sophisticated semiotic analysis of open texts is based on this presupposition and can therefore be understood as an *internal* clarification; internal in the sense that the relationship between a (pre-given) interpretative strategy and a particular text is the main focus. Eco simply does not see any reasons to overthrow the existing hierarchy and hence takes great pains at elucidating the character of the non-trivial reading. Fish's reflections, by contrast, are of a more general or even 'hypothetical' kind. That is to say, *in principle*, Kafka's Trial *can* be read as a telephone directory (or in any other way), i.e. by means of an interpretative strategy that differs completely from that considered appropriate by Eco. The only question is whether there are reasons to consider such a reading an intelligent and fruitful project.

On the other hand, Eco has to admit that we can very well *imagine* a time in which no one sees in Kafka's *Trial* more than a criminal story. Under such circumstances Eco's questions would simply disappear. Put differently, it cannot be denied that the extrapolation of the model reader from the text is – strictly speaking – itself highly contingent and *not* a property of the text itself. Thus Eco's analysis is certainly not presuppositionless. On the contrary, his investigation is based on the *current* practice of reading. But it is precisely for this reason that the questions he raises are extremely relevant and interesting and *deepen* our understanding of this practice.

I shall now turn to Barth's own hermeneutics which will be interpreted in dialogue with the above approaches.

Barth's Hermeneutics

Following the overall structure of the *Prolegomena*, Barth discusses the issue of scriptural interpretation on the basis of his distinction between the objective and the subjective aspect of revelation. Within the objective aspect, he differentiates between the *direct*, *absolute* and *material* authority of Scripture itself and the *indirect*, *relative* and *formal authority* of the Church, which is grounded in and limited by the former authority. Similarly, the subjective aspect divides into the *direct*, *absolute* and *material freedom* of Scripture, which rules in the Church, and the *indirect*, *relative* and *formal freedom* of the Church, which is again grounded in and limited by the former freedom (*KD* I/2, 598ff, 741ff). The *freedom* of Scripture as the Word of God 'completes' its own *authority* since it is not a tyranny but a power which acknowledges the dignity of human beings and seeks their free response. Thus the Word of God, which itself possesses and exercises freedom, evokes *human* freedom (*KD* I/2, 750). Barth thus consistently follows his theocentric principle that even (seemingly) general anthropological features and qualities must be theologically qualified.

Within these boundaries, there is room for human decisions, resolutions and determinations and the responsibility which comes with all this (*KD* I/2, 742, 750). More specifically, there must be a willingness on the part of human beings *to take responsibility for the correct exegesis and application of Scripture*, which Barth calls the *freedom under the Word* (*KD* I/2, 779ff). What is at stake here is a theocentrically reinterpreted *con-scientia*, i.e. the human co-knowledge of that which God knows. Whereas this *freedom* under the Word is fundamentally an individual category, Barth had earlier defined the *authority* under the Word as the willingness and readiness to listen to each other in the reception and acceptance of Scripture (*KD* I/2, 652ff, 781). As far as the freedom under the Word is concerned, Barth again conceives this individual consent to the divine Word – *faith* – in terms of an *event*. And even this event character of faith is not to be understood in terms of a phenomenon which can be perceived (within the spatio-temporal world) and subjected to scrutiny. Rather, Barth insists, its *constitution* as well as its *perceptibility* can only be thought of theocentrically:

> Both it [i.e. faith in Jesus Christ] and therefore also those special events of faith as such are primarily and essentially to be regarded only from above, from Jesus Christ, because they are only real when seen in this way from above, from Jesus Christ (*KD* I/2, 793).

In other words, the events of faith are subject to the contingencies of life and therefore, due to their relativity and ambiguity, cannot form part of a genuine Christian witness. By contrast, the really significant events in our life are "identical with our participation in the great *deeds of God* in his *revelation*" (*KD* I/2, 794). Although Barth originally intended to expound in the second part of § 21 the individual human reception of the Word, he all of a sudden returns to what he calls the *objective aspect* of revelation.

As the *Word of God*, Scripture is clear in itself. It is only because it comes in the form of fragile human words that interpretation is indispensable, for the meaning of human words are – at least for the addressee – *ambiguous*. Barth defines meaning fundamentally in terms of *speaker intention*: successful communication is achieved if the intended meaning of the speaker can be identically transferred to the mind of the addressee (*KD* I/2, 799).[138] What Barth has in mind here, is the authorial intention of the *biblical writer* – not that of the proclaimer. In this respect, Barth's hermeneutics resembles that of Hirsch, although he does not embrace the latter's hypothetico-deductive approach. But how far is such a comparison really tenable? According to Hirsch's definition of verbal meaning as *willed type*, there is no interpretative freedom whatsoever, since we are completely subservient to the will of the author. As indicated above, it is a *willed* type because authorial intention is based on the notion of a consciously intended meaning. And it is a willed *type* since its content can be delineated without any ambiguity and fully and self-identically represented in single

[138] The sense of human words „will unter den verschiedenen in Betracht kommenden Möglichkeiten als der vom Sprechenden beabsichtigte Sinn ermittelt und er will als der Sinn, den sie für den Sprechenden haben, in das Denken des Hörenden übertragen werden, so dass sie nun auch für ihn Sinn und zwar denselben, den vom Sprechenden beabsichtigten Sinn haben" (*KD* I/2, 799).

instances. As a result, a type is indefinitely iterable. Thus Hirsch's understanding of verbal meaning as type is characterised by determinacy and iterability.

But it is not entirely clear whether Barth really shares Hirsch's extreme notion of full determinacy. Although he emphatically points out that the interpreter has to subordinate his pre-understanding (*Vorverständins*) to Scripture, interpretation is not thought of in terms of a reception of fully determined meanings conveyed by the text that merely need to be retrieved by the interpreter. Rather, subordination concerns the *direction* and *purpose* (*Richtung*) indicated in the ideas, thoughts and convictions of the prophets and apostles, that which they wanted to *bring about* (*ausrichten*) (*KD* I/2, 806). It is particularly this last formulation which points in the direction of what Hirsch calls *significance*. Whereas verbal meaning, understood as 'willed type', is a property of the text, i.e. 'meaning-*in*', significance is always 'meaning-*to*'. That is to say, it refers to the relationship between someone's verbal meaning and 'something else'. A brief look at Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics may help to clarify this point.

According to Ricœur, the mental meaning of the speaker manifests itself in discourse, i.e. the utterer's meaning leaves its imprint on the utterance meaning, for example through shifters, pointing back to the speaker, personal pronouns, tenses and adjectives of time, etc.[139] What can be fixed in writing, however, is not the event of discourse, but only the 'what' of the event, the *intentional exteriorization*, the *noema* of the speech-act. Whereas it is unproblematic to communicate the propositional content of an utterance (*locutionary* act) through writing, it is somewhat more difficult to convey the *illocutionary* act, and very difficult to transmit the *perlocutionary* act. For the perlocutionary function "is less an intentional act, calling for an intention of recognition on the part of the hearer, than a kind of 'stimulus' generating a 'response' in a behavioural sense".[140] What cannot be fixed at all, however, is prosody, i.e. suprasegmental phonological features such as intonation and stress. Perhaps, Barth's remarks about that which the apostles and prophets wanted to *bring about* could be interpreted in terms of the *perlocutionary* act.[141]

Yet Ricœur's stress on the dissociation of textual meaning and mental intention in written discourse clearly goes a step further than Barth. Whereas in spoken language, the subjective intention of the speaker and the meaning of discourse overlap, with written language, "… the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide".[142] As there is no longer a situation common to the writer and the reader, the meaning of the text is open to an indefinite number of readers and interpretations: "The reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading. The text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer. It

[139] P. Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*, 104.
[140] Ibid., 106f.
[141] In a Barthian line of thougt, Van Hoozer suggests that Scripture on the one hand *is* the Word of God in the sense of divine locution and illocution and may *become* the Word of God in the sense of the perlocutionary effects it achieves, see K. Vanhoozer, *God's Mighty Speech-Acts*, 178. Yet this statement does not entail the notion that the perlocutionary act can be conveyed by writing.
[142] P. Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 200.

thereby replaces the relation of dialogue, which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other".[143]

According to Barth, the conveyance of meaning from author (i.e. the biblical author) to addressee falls into two different phases: *exegesis* (*Auslegung*) and *application* (*Anwendung*). But who has the authority and competence to carry out this transfer? Barth suggests that at times, the speaker (i.e. author) or the addressee might suffice to accomplish this transfer of meaning successfully.[144] As a result, not only Scripture as the Word of God but also as *human* word is to a certain extent self-explanatory (*KD* I/2, 799f). But since this latter *claritas* is limited, a mediating *third* interpreter is nonetheless indispensable.[145] A member of the Church is called to mediate between Scripture and the addressee. First, he needs to establish the meaning of the text, and second, to tell the addressee "that and how far the word of Scripture also has meaning to him [i.e. the addressee] …" (*KD* I/2, 800). This hermeneutical responsibility concerns all members of the Church and not just a small elite of scribes: *the whole Church is the organisation of this service of mediation* (*KD* I/2, 801). For this reason, there is no one in the Church who simply passively receives the interpretation of the minister who mediates between Scripture and addressee.

The pivotal principle of scriptural hermeneutics is for Barth that of *subordination*. Our pre-understanding, i.e. our ideas, thoughts and convictions need be *freely* subordinated to the ideas, thoughts and convictions of the biblical witnesses. It is only then that the *claritas* of the Word can become an event (*KD* I/2, 805). But subordination is not to be confused with elimination or annihilation; that would be quite impossible. Rather, "[s]ubordination implies that the subordinate is there as such and remains there. It means placing oneself behind, following, complying as subordinate to superior" (*KD* I/2, 805). Furthermore, subordination is not simply a repetition of that which the apostles and prophets said. Rather, as we have seen above, it must be faithful to the *purpose* of their witness, to that which they wanted to *bring about* by their words (*KD* I/2, 806).

There is a clear correspondence between Barth's hermeneutics and the central tenet of his theology that the eschatological reality of the risen Christ takes "ontological and criteriological priority over the experiential reality which we share".[146] Accordingly, "the text, or *the* meaning of the text is regarded as simply autonomous […] that is, a semiotic world of its own, regardless of its reception".[147] This also accounts for Barth's emphasis on subordination and his reluctance to discuss what he calls 'general hermeneutic' theories. According to him, general hermeneutics sees the relationship between text and the pre-understanding of the interpreter as a dia-

[143] Ibid., 146f.
[144] "Wie sollten die Propheten und Apostel nicht auch immer wieder direkt in der Erklärung gehört werden, die die Hörenden sich selbst zu geben vermögend sind? Und wie sollten sie nicht auch immer wieder in der Lage sein, sich selbst zu erklären?" (*KD* I/2, 799).
[145] What remains unclear is how this limited *claritas* is to be conceived and how it is related to the following reflections about the *necessity* of a mediator. Under what circumstances can the addressee rely on the self-explanatory character of the human words and therefore dispense with an interpreter? Is this notion plausible at all?
[146] I.U. Dalferth, *Karl Barth's eschatological realism*, 22.
[147] H.W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 85.

logue *inter pares*. As far as the biblical text and its interpreters are concerned, however, it is a dialogue *inter impares* (*KD* I/2, 807). It is the nature of this asymmetry that now needs to be explored. Barth here obviously relapses into a time-eternity dualism which hinders him from developing a genuinely *theological* hermeneutics. For Christian theology has no difficulty accepting the finite conditions of all human acts of interpretation and this implies that the inevitability of a pre-understanding does not constitute a problem. Consequently, a theological hermeneutics has to make sure that not only the text but also the pre-understanding is *theologically qualified*. And since a pre-understanding is not just a set of principles and rules which the interpreter 'applies' to the text, sociological, ecclesiological and institutional aspects need to be taken into account as well. As we have seen, the practice and horizon of interpretation$_1$ is also highly relevant with respect to text interpretation.

Barth accepts the "only seemingly tautological exegetical rule of the older Protestant Orthodoxy, whereby an interpretation of Scripture is to be recognised as true or false by the fact that, if it is true, it is in accord with Scripture so far as this is the Word of God" (*KD* I/2, 807). Put differently, what guides exegesis is the content or centre of Scripture which is for Barth *Jesus Christ in his gracious care for the sinner*.[148] As I shall try to show below, Barth derives from this evidently *theological* dependence of man from the grace of God a *hermeneutical* theory which is supposed to safeguard the primacy of the biblical word but in fact fails to do this job.

In his reflections on exegesis Barth distinguishes between three individual phases: observation (*Beobachtung*), reflection (*Nachdenken*) and appropriation (*Aneignung*) (*KD* I/2, 810ff). He follows here the threefold distinction between *subtilitas intelligendi*, *subtilitas explicandi* and *subtilitas applicandi*, which goes back to the pietist J.J. Rambach.[149]

1) *Observation*: this first interpretative phase is concerned with the *sensus* and the *explicatio* of Scripture. We first have to read the words of the apostles as documents of their concrete historical situation. Insofar as this first aspect of *explicatio* is the result of a literary-historical observation, it falls, according to Barth, within the range of a *general hermeneutics*. He first distinguishes between the *literary*(-historical) and the (literary-)*historical* side of this process of interpretation, which roughly corresponds to the traditional differentiation between speaker intention (cf. Hirsch) and external reference (cf. Wrede). On the one hand, Barth considers the prophets and apostles themselves as speakers (*KD* I/2, 810). On the other hand, the image (*Bild*) of their words mirrors (*spiegelt*) the image (*Bild*) of an *object* (*KD* I/2, 811). However, as far as this latter aspect is concerned, Barth does not aim at reconstructing allegedly 'objective' and indubitable historical facts which are supposed to replace the merely 'subjective' and biased witness of the New Testament writers in the sense of a historical positivism. Nonetheless, explication *is* dependent on historical research:

[148] "Erklären – im Dienst der Klarheit, die die Bibel als Gottes Wort sich selbst verschafft – können wir sie also grundsätzlich im Ganzen wie im Einzelnen nur, indem wir sehen und aufzeigen, wie das, was sie sagt, von jenem verhüllten und enthüllten Namen Jesus Christus her gesagt und also in Bezeugung der Gnade gesagt ist, deren wir als Menschen bedürftig, von uns als Menschen aus unvermögend, von Gott her aber teilhaftig sind" (*KD* I/2, 808).
[149] J.J. Rambach, *Institutiones hermeneuticae sacrae*.

… I try to form a picture of what has taken place on the spot to which the words of the author refer, and of what has occasioned the author to use these particular words of his text. To form a picture of this happening means, however, that as it comes to me in the mirror of these words by means of the literary examination, I shall fit it into [*einordnen*] the series of other pictures which are at my disposal through reconstructing the *objective* historical situation of the author and of what he has seen. These will include pictures of his own time, its events and typical manifestations, its circumstances and aspirations, its natural and intellectual conception, its objective and subjective assumptions and problems. They will also include pictures of the periods which immediately precede and follow, in the sequence of which the happening which he reports takes its place, and within the process of which it forms an essential member, linking what goes before with what follows (*KD* I/2, 811).

Although this interpretative step certainly entails reference to extra-biblical material, Barth does not suggest a reductive approach which replaces the perspective of faith by an allegedly more objective one. Nonetheless, his use of the term 'objective' is somewhat misleading. In actual fact, he wants to highlight the *inevitability of a particular pre-understanding* for every interpreter. That is to say, Barth is fully aware of the perspectival character of *every* historical approach. Translating that into Abel's terminology, one could say that there is the most fundamental level of interpretation$_1$ which shapes and governs all acts of interpretation$_{2+3}$. Fish would call this an interpretative strategy.[150] Barth writes:

It is not to be forgotten – and here the matter becomes critical: I have, of course, a more or less definite picture of historical realities *generally*, and of the *whole* epoch which forms the framework of the observable historical process in which the event referred to in the text has its special place. This *general* picture will certainly determine my picture of the time in which the event referred to in the text falls, my picture of the preceding and succeeding periods, and of the whole historical process. And this applies necessarily also to the particular picture which I form of this event in the narrowest of those various circles (*KD* I/2, 812).

Yet, according to Barth, also the obverse may occur:

Alternatively, it is possible that this particular picture – not because it is my picture, but because it is the representation of the object spoken of to me – will be so strong that it will determine and modify, shatter and remould my previous picture of that time, then of the whole historical process and in the end perhaps even of the historical reality generally. Even within the framework of *general hermeneutics* I shall obviously have to reckon with both possibilities (*KD* I/2, 812, italics mine).

However, there seems to be a certain confusion in this last quotation which can be spelled out by drawing on Abel's distinction between interpretation$_1$ and interpretation$_3$. It is of course possible that an interpreter discovers new truths in a text without changing his most basic interpretative presuppositions. That is to say, he only modifies his views on the level of interpretation$_3$, which leaves the level of interpretation$_1$ unaffected. He thus still inhabits the 'same' world. But in the above quotation, Barth suggests that the interpreter may modify his understanding of the *historical reality in general* while still remaining within the framework of a *general* hermeneutics. I take the expression 'general hermeneutics' to be a summary term for all hermeneutical approaches which are not explicitly based on Christian presuppositions. If this interpretation is correct, it becomes difficult to make sense of the above quotation. To adopt a new understanding of the 'historical reality in general' is tantamount to changing one's world-view – an alteration which clearly concerns the level of interpretation$_1$. Now if the reader comes to assume a new world view, this hardly takes place *within* the framework of general hermeneutics. Rather, he *replaces* his previous

[150] I am not suggesting that these different approaches do coincide, but they at least partly overlap.

interpretative framework for a completely different one. But perhaps Barth simply wants to say that even if the interpreter's *starting point* is general hermeneutics, the process of reading might lead him to alter even his basic presuppositions on the level of interpretation$_1$. If the latter is the case, the interpreter undergoes a *conversion*.

Yet Barth's reflections point in a different direction. According to him, general hermeneutics only allows for alterations of the prevailing interpretative presuppositions *within definite limits*. That is to say, it self-evidently presupposes what is generally possible. This implies that changes on the level of interpretation$_1$ are *excluded*. Yet Barth does not seem to be saying that only a Christian pre-understanding enables the reader to interpret Scripture appropriately. Rather, he claims biblical hermeneutics to be more *objective*, since – unlike general hermeneutics – "it follows the way of strict observation to the very end" (*KD* I/2, 813). This statement is not to be interpreted in terms of a foundationalist hermeneutics but rather results from Barth's explicitly *theological* realism. He does by no means deny that biblical hermeneutics is based on interpretative presuppositions. On the contrary, that which renders biblical hermeneutics more objective *is* its Christian presuppositions.[151] The problem lies elsewhere: Barth resorts to the notion of 'strict observation' because his epistemological premises force him to conceive the conditions of possibility of an appropriate interpretation as being *inherent* in the text. What makes Barth's reflections on *sensus* and *explicatio* confusing is the fact that he oscillates between two different and irreconcilable positions.

a) On the one hand, he does distinguish between general and biblical hermeneutics, i.e. between different pre-understandings. Whereas *biblical* hermeneutics allows the picture of the object (*Gegenstandsbild*) in the text to exercise its challenging force, *general* hermeneutics imposes restrictions on the text which limit its theological potential. In other words, it is possible to draw a distinction between *appropriate* and *inappropriate* pre-understandings. This in turn presupposes that there *is* a difference between text and pre-understanding – even if the text is never immediately accessible but always already located within a particular interpretative framework. If one follows this line of argument, the interpretative strategy/community (to use Fish's terminology) clearly emerges as an 'independent' hermeneutical factor that needs to be taken seriously and which becomes sociologically graspable as well. Consequently, biblical hermeneutics is *one* of them – even if from a theological perspective the *only* appropriate one. However, such a view clashes with central statements in the *Prolegomena*. According to Barth, God can only be known through God. But this by no means leads to the notion of a permanent, i.e. diachronic indwelling of God in the ecclesiastical community. Yet such an indwelling is undoubtedly required in order to do justice to both, the principle that God can only be known through God, and the notion that a specifically ecclesial interpretative strategy/community is required in order to understand Scripture adequately. As Milbank

[151] Biblical hermeneutics follows the way of strict observation: "Gewiss tut sie dies ihrerseits auf Grund einer bestimmten Voraussetzung. Es ist aber zu bemerken, dass diese ihre Voraussetzung ihr ermöglicht, als Hermeneutik konsequent zu sein, was man von jener Voraussetzung der allgemeinen Hermeneutik gerade nicht sagen kann" (*KD* I/2, 813).

puts it, there must be something "like a *communicatio idiomatum* between Church and Spirit, without an identifiable point of union in either nature or personhood".[152]

b) On the other hand, the necessity of an appropriate pre-understanding is denied altogether since the picture of the object (*Gegenstandsbild*) in the text, which Barth identifies with the name of Jesus Christ, exercises an irresistible force and unambiguously presents itself to the interpreter. This also accounts for Barth's statement that "theological hermeneutics […] is not claiming for itself a mysterious special privilege …" (*KD* I/2, 815). There is no such privilege because of the alleged *self-evidence* of the picture of the object (*Gegenstandsbild*) in the text. If one follows this line of thought, it is not possible to draw a distinction between text and pre-understanding or interpretative strategy/community. Rather, the interpreter's pre-understanding becomes in principle irrelevant, since the picture of the object (*Gegenstandsbild*) is able to overcome all obstacles that might initially be opposed to its self-revelatory dynamics. As will be shown below, it is clearly this second approach b) which takes centre stage in the remaining pages of *KD* I/2, § 21.

2) Barth proceeds in elucidating the meaning of what he calls "the act of *reflection* on what Scripture declares to us" (*KD* I/2, 815). This reflection occupies a place in between *sensus* and *usus* or *explicatio* and *applicatio*. However, in spite of this differentiation, it does not constitute an independent and isolatable interpretative move which succeeds *explicatio*.

Barth fully concedes that *every* interpretation of Scripture has a perspectival character. The simplest Bible reader as well as the most sophisticated exegete cannot but approach the text from the standpoint of a particular epistemology, logic and ethics, and inevitably possesses a certain pre-understanding of God, self and world. Accordingly, the interpreter *must* first make use of his system of thought if interpretation is supposed to take place at all. Yet the question is *how* this use is to be thought of (*KD* I/2, 818ff).

First, the interpreter has to be aware that *no* pre-understanding as such is appropriate to interpret Scripture. On the contrary, we can be sure that *every* pre-understanding is inappropriate – even if it might *become* appropriate through the encounter with Scripture. Secondly, every interpretation of Scripture which is based on a particular pre-understanding can therefore only have the character of an *essay* or *hypothesis*. For this reason the possibility cannot be excluded that, under certain circumstances, other philosophies might be more appropriate than the one initially chosen. Thirdly, *every* pre-understanding does constitute a threat to the authority of Scripture if it is *not* subordinated to the biblical word, but *no* pre-understanding is dangerous as such if it *is* subordinated to it. Fourthly, there is no reason to privilege one mode of thought to another, even if our choices are of course never just arbitrary. But in making specific selections, we do not follow a universal rule. Rather, our choices depend on particular situations and contexts. Fifthly, Barth writes: "The use of a scheme of thought in the service of scriptural exegesis is legitimate and fruitful when it is determined (*bestimmt*) and controlled (*beherrscht*) by the text and the pic-

[152] J. Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 185.

ture of the object (*Gegenstandsbild*) mirrored in the text" (*KD* I/2, 823). Barth thus *advocates* a critical use of human schemes of thought, in which the latter is the *object* of this critique and *Scripture* the subject! For this reason, *any* philosophy can be criticised in order to serve the Word of God and subsequently fulfil a positive hermeneutical function.

There is much to be learned from Barth's theological hermeneutics, provided one reads the above exposition *eschatologically*. In his reflections on dogmatics, Barth calls dogma an "'eschatological concept'" (*KD* I/1, 284) and defines it as "*Church proclamation, so far as it really agrees with the Bible as the Word of God*" (*KD* I/1, 283). He clearly conceives of dogma as a *limit concept* – to use Simon's terminology – thus emphasising the diachronic dimension of this human activity and the need for infinite progress and perfectibility[153]:

> … the creaturely form which the revealing action of God assumes in dogmatics is never that of knowledge attained in a flash (*Erkenntnis im Nu*), which it would have to be to correspond to the divine gift, but a laborious movement from one partial human insight to another with the intention though no *guarantee* of 'advance'!" (*KD* I/1, 13).[154]

But it is almost exclusively in his exposition of the nature of dogmatics that Barth takes into account this diachronic dimension – which is otherwise strikingly absent in the *Prolegomena*. Perhaps it was the laborious business of writing the *Church Dogmatics* which made it abundantly clear to Barth that this aspect could not be ignored! Furthermore, the *content* of the *Church Dogmatics* resulted from a painstaking, ecumenical dialogue with the Christian tradition. In other words, in spite of the originality of Barth's work, there is not only discontinuity but also a lot of *continuity* between his own thought and that of past thinkers. In his reflections on *faith*, by contrast, discontinuity is always (or most of the time) emphasised *at the expense* of continuity (*KD* I/2, 791ff; I/1, 231). This makes it very difficult to understand theology as a human activity which – as *fides quaerens intellectum* – is *rooted* in faith.

Now the same questions arise as regards the biblical text and its pre-understanding(s). Strictly speaking, the notion of a completely appropriate pre-understanding is an *eschatological concept* too. It follows from this that no pre-understanding which is available at present can do *fully* justice to the biblical text. But the crucial question is which *consequences* one draws from this insight. One might say that every pre-understanding or interpretative strategy which is applied to the biblical text must be infinitely improved. Yet this need for infinite refinement always manifests itself in *concrete* acts of modification, which become necessary due to *concrete* insights into why the present interpretative practice is no longer fully convincing. Put differently, one needs *reasons* to modify a particular interpretative strategy, and these reasons always concern *certain* elements, but leave others unaf-

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[153] It is of course difficult to distinguish between (mere) synchronic *difference* and diachronic *progress*. That is to say, a re-actualisation or re-interpretation of a dogma in a *new* context does not necessarily involve the notion of progress. On the other hand, the eschatological-teleological dimension is essential to Christian faith.

[154] "Die geschöpfliche Gestalt, die das offenbarende Handeln Gottes in der Dogmatik gewinnt, ist darum gar nicht die einer Erkenntnis im Nu, wie sie es der göttlichen Gabe entsprechend freilich sein müsste, sondern ein mühsames Schreiten von einer menschlichen Teileinsicht zu anderen, mit der *Absicht*, aber in keiner Weise mit der *Garantie* eines „Fortschrittes"!" (*KD* I/1, 13).

fected. This is due to the fact that it is impossible, under finite conditions, to regard a hermeneutical approach *as a whole*, i.e. from an external viewpoint. If one follows this line of thought, theology has to pay the utmost attention to the structure of finite processes of interpretation. This also includes the study of a text's *Wirkungsgeschichte*. And although it is certainly imperative for theologians to develop a specifically *theological* hermeneutics, dialogue with *general* hermeneutics becomes indispensable.

However, Barth's own reflections clearly do not follow this path. His notion of the subordination of the pre-understanding to the text does not allow for a gradual refinement of the current interpretative strategy. Rather, every pre-understanding is – even if unavoidable – in principle regarded as a hindrance to an appropriate understanding of the text and must therefore be done away with. This inevitably follows from statements such as '*no* philosophy *must* be a threat to the biblical word, but *every* philosophy *can* become a threat to the world of Scripture'. To be sure, read in isolation, this sentence *can* be understood in a diachronic-teleological way. But the decisive question is by which *human* activity the goal of subordinating the pre-understanding to the text can be achieved. And Barth's implicit answer is: by *no* human activity, but only by Scripture's self-revelatory power which derives from the picture of the object (*Gegenstandsbild*), Jesus Christ. Since every pre-understanding can be 'subordinated' in this way, there is in principle no need to enter the current debate on hermeneutics. Human and divine agency is thus played off against each other.

As outlined above, the alternative would be to conceive the relationship between text and pre-understanding in terms of an *asymmetrical reciprocity*. On the one hand, since human finitude need not and cannot be overcome, the pre-understanding must be accepted as a necessary constituent of every act or practice of interpretation. Thus interpretative strategies fulfil a positive function and should not be regarded as a hindrance to an adequate understanding of the biblical text. On the other hand, the pre-understanding is *subordinated* to the text in the sense that – in the process of text interpretation – the 'text' may indeed question the interpretative presuppositions which led to particular interpretations. But it is of course not possible to ascribe agency to the 'text itself'. Rather, it is the *interpreters* who consider and critically evaluate the interpretations (and their further consequences) which resulted from a particular interpretative strategy. If there is only one single interpretation that fails to conform to the interpretative criteria established by their community, this may be due to the incompetence of a single interpreter ($\approx$ interpretation$_3$). But if the community comes to the conclusion that a whole series of interpretations did not do justice to what Barth calls the *Gegenstandsbild* of the text, a refinement of the basic presuppositions may be required ($\approx$ interpretation$_1$).

Yet some of Barth's remarks are undoubtedly less extreme and seem to envisage something like a Christian *ad hoc* hermeneutics which is context- and purpose-sensitive. But here too, one might ask: What does hold these different context- and purpose-dependent hermeneutical approaches together? Is there room enough for continuity? On the one hand it is certainly correct to say that we never follow a uni-

versal and unchangeable rule when we interpret texts. On the other hand, one has to be aware that the most basic interpretative presuppositions are not consciously chosen strategies but inextricably intertwined with *patterns of action* or *habits*.[155] This in turn leads back to Fish's notion of interpretative *communities*. It follows from this that – despite the need for context- and purpose-sensitivity – it is somewhat naïve to believe that we can (or should) change our interpretative strategies (on their most basic level) from one context or situation to another. In other words, Barth problematically emphasises discontinuity at the expense of continuity.

3) Barth finally turns to *applicatio* and the *usus scripturae*. He again points out that *explicatio*, *meditatio* and *applicatio* are in fact inseparable and constitute different aspects of one single interpretative act (*KD* I/2, 825). *Applicatio* means assimilation (*Aneignung*), i.e.:

> … that which is declared to us must become our very own, and indeed in such a way that now we really do become *conscientes* […] those who in virtue of what is said to them know themselves, and can, therefore, say to themselves and to others what is said to them – those who not only reflect on it but think it themselves. To think themselves: from inner impulse and necessity, just as we think something because we must, because we cannot not think it, because it has become a fundamental orientation of our whole existence (*KD* I/2, 826).

Barth emphatically points out that the two preceding steps, *explicatio* and *meditatio* must not be seen as the *theoretical* part of interpretation which is now followed by the *practical* one, *applicatio*. This would lead to a highly problematic divorce between an ostensible "righteousness of faith and a suddenly triumphant righteousness of works" (*KD* I/2, 826). It is here that Barth comes closest to Gadamer's statement that the three moments of the 'hermeneutical situation', understanding (*Verstehen*), interpretation (*Auslegen*) and application (*Anwendung*) are inseparable.[156]

There are two interrelated questions that need be raised as regards Barth's understanding of *applicatio*. First, how are we to think of the transition from one interpretative perspective on the world to another brought about by the appropriation of the Gospel narratives (on the level of interpreation$_1$)? Secondly, how far does this shift shed a new light on the many *xs* in the world (on the level of interpretation$_3$)? As far as the first question is concerned, Barth points out that assimilation should not be taken in terms of a (mis)use of Scripture for our own purposes. Once again resorting to theocentric language, he stresses that the *usus scripturae* must be interpreted in the sense that Scripture is the *subject* and the hearer or reader the *object*, rather than the other way round (*KD* I/2, 827). Yet here too, as in the above discussion about the eschatological character of the appropriate pre-understanding, the question arises as to how the otherness of Scripture can be mediated under finite conditions. Taking recourse to theocentric language does not solve the problem but at best posits the practice and horizon of interpretation$_1$, (potentially) represented by Scripture, as an ideal which the interpreters *strive* to realise. In other words, also the process of assimilating Scripture is to be thought of in terms of a *temporal process*. For instance,

[155] In Abel as well as in Peirce's work *interpretation* and *action* are inextricably intertwined.
[156] H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 290-295.

attempts have been made to understand a human being's gradual appropriation of the Gospel narratives in terms of the acquisition of certain virtues.[157]

As far as the second point is concerned, there is a certain tendency to think of this *appropriatio* not as a transition from one interpretative *perspective* to another, but as a shift to different *questions*. Barth writes:

> Precisely in order that he may really appropriate what Scripture has to say, the reader and hearer must be willing to transpose the centre of his attention from himself, from the system of his own concerns and questions […] to the scriptural word itself. He must allow himself to be lifted out of himself into this word and its concerns and questions (*KD* I/2, 828f).

To be sure, Christian faith does not just provide us with different *answers* to unchanging questions, but indeed raises *new* issues which we could never have thought of without the event of revelation. Nonetheless, what must be avoided at any price is the notion that faith concerns only a separate realm cut off from non-religious or secular matters. Put differently, theology needs to be "'more mediating, but less accommodating'"[158], i.e. continuity and discontinuity must be accentuated in the right place and in the right way. On the one hand, there is supposed to be a radical *discontinuity* between the Christian perspective on the world and all other non-Christian perspectives. Yet even on this plane, there is no room for a simple dualism. Rather, it is possible to differentiate, *from* the Christian perspective, *within* the non-Christian realm, between elements that exhibit different degrees of affinity with the Christian *Logos*. Only thus can a crude fideism be avoided. On the other hand, there is supposed to be a relative *continuity* as regards the many *xs* which are re-interpreted innovatively and creatively from a Christian perspective. That is to say, Christians share a great deal of their questions and problems with the non-Christian world. It is primarily their specifically Christian *answers* which differ from other, non-Christian answers.

Conclusions

In this last chapter on Barth's hermeneutics, I was dealing with the question of how the sender *encodes* the message he conveys to the addressee. More specifically, I was interested in how far acts of interpretation of the kind *s interprets (or sets) x as y to a in the context c* are really informed by Scripture, which is supposed to come into play in the '*as-structure*' of this formula. Yet, as I have tried to show, Barth's understanding of subordination (*Unterordnung*) is problematic since he fails to pay sufficient attention to the finite conditions of human interpretation. As a result, he disregards to some extent the need for a specifically *theological* qualification of the pre-understanding (or interpretative strategy/community). This is due to his conviction that the 'true meaning' of the text (*Gegenstandsbild*) has the power to reveal itself *without finite human mediation*. But such a view inevitably has consequences which are directly opposed to Barth's actual intention: *The interpreter remains at the mercy of the prevailing interpretative practice.* In consequence, there is a high degree of *contingency* as regards the encoded message. The interpretative act that sets '*x* as *y*'

[157] Cf. R. Roberts, *Narrative ethics*, 473-480.
[158] J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, G. Ward, *Suspending the Material*, 2.

and which is supposed to be informed by a specific interpretative perspective (interpretation$_1$), is to a large extent influenced by other, uncontrolled and arbitrary factors.

b) The addressee

In this chapter, the focus shall no longer be on the encoding of the message but on Barth's idea of speech, i.e. on *oral communication* and the *reception* of the message by the addressee. A brief comparison with Husserl's *Logical Investigations* will help us better understand Barth's understanding of orality. Whereas in the above chapter on 'knowledge and faith as meaning-fulfilment' the anthropocentric perspective of faith stood at the centre of attention, I shall here take a *sender-related pragmatic approach* to Barth's understanding of meaning. Husserl's theory of orality, as outlined in the first *Logical Investigation* and famously criticised by Derrida in his *Voice and Phenomenon*, shows striking similarities to Barth's idea of speech.[159] Both Barth and Husserl exhibit a strong tendency to ignore the *finite* conditions under which human communication is taking place. As will be shown later in this chapter, any theory of communication must take into account that the *background knowledge*, i.e. the *private* and *communal codes* of the sender and the addressee may differ considerably. As a result, the reception of the message by the addressee is to be seen as a *creative act*, or at least as an act which entails *creative elements*. Husserl and Barth however, try to show (Husserl) or simply presuppose (Barth) that oral communication enables us to bypass any contingent factors. Of course, as far as Barth is concerned, it is not just oral communication in general, but rather a highly specific and theologically qualified hermeneutical situation in which this goal can be achieved. In both cases, however, the sender is believed to be able to convey his message self-identically, i.e. without any distortions and risks of misunderstandings to the addressee. I shall first give an account of Derrida's interpretation of Husserl's first *Logical Investigation* and then compare the latter's understanding of orality to that of Barth.

Derrida on Husserl

Expression and indication

In his first *Logical Investigation*, Husserl famously points to the ambiguity in the sense of the word 'sign', distinguishing between expression (*Ausdruck*) and indication (*Anzeichen*). Although every sign is a sign *for* something, not every sign *expresses meaning* or *sense*. And according to him, indications do not convey anything that could be called sense or meaning, only expressions do (*LU* I, § 1). Husserl gives the following examples of indications: a brand is a sign of a slave, or a flag a sign of a nation (*LU* I, § 2). The indicative function can therefore be described as a certain *motivation* to move mentally from something to something else. It effects a transition from an actual consciousness to a non-actual one which may take on the form of a conviction (*Überzeugung*) or presumption (*Vermutung*), and the elements linked by an indicative sign are either objects or state of affairs.

[159] J. Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*.

Expression, on the other hand, is a *voluntary*, i.e. *conscious* and *intentional exteriorization*. It is inconceivable without a subject *animating* the sign, providing it with a *Geistigkeit*. In indication, this animation is limited, first, by the body of the sign, and secondly, by that which it indicates in the empirical world. In expression however, the voice which is animated may remain *entirely internal* since the expressed is an ideal meaning, which does not 'exist' in the empirical world (*VPh*, 34-36). All elements which constitute the *empirical effectiveness* of an utterance belong to indication and are foreign to pure intention and expression. Not only because this effectiveness is part of the *empirical world*, but also because "it retains in itself something of the nature of an *involuntary* association" (*VPh*, 37). This last point is important: for Husserl, *intentional* consciousness and *voluntary* consciousness are synonyms (and cannot be found in purity in the 'totality of speech'). Derrida thus interprets Husserl's notion of intentionality in terms of a *voluntaristic metaphysics*.

Everything which is not "pure spiritual intention" and "pure animation by *Geist*", is excluded from meaning, and consequently, from expression (*VPh*, 37). The whole visual and spatial realm falls into this category, which entails "facial expression and the various gestures which involuntarily accompany speech without communicative intent …" (*LU* I, § 5). These elements cannot be called expressions as they lack explicit intention to evince something expressively. However, meaning is nevertheless *latently* present in indicative signs such as facial expressions, gestures and so on. But their hidden meaning becomes only manifest when they are interpreted and made explicit in discourse. In other words, it is oral *interpretation* which brings out the meaning implicitly present in them. Thus non-expressive signs only have meaning to the degree to which this interpretation can be carried out successively, for the *telos* of all language "is voluntary consciousness as meaning (*comme vouloir-dire*)" (*VPh*, 38).

Yet it would be inappropriate to regard oral discourse as the carrier of expression *par excellence*, for even after excluding all non-discursive and non-intentional signs from speech, "there still remains a considerable sphere of the non-expressive within speech itself" (*VPh*, 39f); cf. *LU* I, § 6). Hence even the non-physical part of speech needs still further 'purification'. Husserl thus tries to eliminate everything in connection with the conveyance of mental experiences. As Derrida puts it: "*All speech inasmuch as it is engaged in communication and manifests lived experience operates as indication*" (*VPh*, 40). Only the *suspension of communication* allows pure expression to appear. For in communication, sensible phenomena are animated by a subject endowing them with sense, whose intention is supposed to be simultaneously understood by the addressee. Yet this animation cannot be pure and comprehensive as it is directed at an opaque body with which it intermingles. For everything in speech which is supposed to convey an experience is necessarily mediated by the physical side of speech (*LU* I, § 7). Consequently, due to this unavoidable and irreducible mediation, every expression is involved in an indicative operation, as the manifesting function (*kundgebende Funktion*) *is* an indicative function. This brings us close to the origin of indication: "[T]here is indication each time the act of conferring sense, the

animating intention, the living spirituality of the meaning (*vouloir-dire*), is not fully present" (*VPh*, 41).

The essentially indicative character of communication or intimation is due to the fact that we do not have primordial intuition of the other person's lived experience. The signifier is always of an indicative nature if the immediate and full presence of the signified is hidden. Indication does not render anything manifest, if we understand the term manifest in the sense of 'evident', 'open', and 'presented in person'. Rather, *Kundgabe* reveals and conceals at the same time what it informs us about (*VPh*, 43). *Pure expression*, by contrast, is the pure active intention of an act of meaning, animating a speech whose content (*Bedeutung*) is *fully present*. But pure expression is solely present in consciousness, to an inner intuition or perception. Consequently, it becomes solely conceivable if the relation to the other is suspended; only thus mediation through the physical realm can be bypassed.

It thus comes as no surprise that Husserl finally turns to expressions in uncommunicated, solitary mental life (*im einsamen Seelenleben*), where the physical event of language seems absent (*LU* I, § 8). In solitary mental life, *Kundgabe* as well as *Kundnahme* are suspended. Soliloquy does not imply the notion of speech to oneself, employing words as signs, i.e. as indications of one's own inner experiences. We no longer use real (*wirkliche*) words but only imagined (*vorgestellte*) words. And whereas in real communication *existing* signs can only indicate other existences which are *probable*, in monologue, where expression is pure, *non-existent* signs show significations (*Bedeutungen*) that are *ideal* (i.e. non-existent) and *certain* (i.e. presented to intuition) (*VPh*, 47f). That is to say, in the latter case, words only occur in imagination, without entering the empirical world.

Expression and time

Husserl's notion of pure expression presupposes that ideal meanings, which only occur in solitary mental life, are not exposed to the contingencies of the spatio-temporal realm. Hence expression is inconceivable without the notion of the undivided unity of the temporal *present*. Accordingly, in Husserl's reflections on time in *The phenomenology of internal time-consciousness*, the concept of *punctuality* plays a major role.[160]

However, despite the emphasis upon the concept of presence as a punctual 'now', Husserl himself undermines the notion of the present as self-identity at various points in his writings. Derrida's analysis reveals that the presence of the perceived present could not appear without continuous involvement with a non-present and non-perception: *primary memory* and *expectation*, *retention* and *protention*. These non-perceptions are by no means dispensable supplements which only occasionally accompany the present 'now', but are its essential constituents. Husserl even goes so far as to say that retention (primary memory) is still a perception.[161] That is to say, there is perception which is not tied to the present now but related to a non-present, a 'past and unreal' present.

[160] E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*.
[161] Ibid., § 17.

In other words, there is a certain continuity between the now and the not-now, between perception and non-perception. This is turn allows for the other (the non-present) to be 'received' into the self-identity of the 'blink of an eye' (*VPh*, 73). The original punctuality of the instant begins to incorporate extension and duration. Alterity, far from concealing or distorting the presence of the primordial impression, even becomes the *condition* for presence, presentation and representation (as *Vorstellung*) in general. Now the move from punctuality to extension and duration, the continuity between the present and the non-present seems to bring the mediatory role of signs back into play.

Yet Husserl cannot accept the necessity of signs as that would question the very principle of phenomenology outlined above. This accounts for his sustained insistence that retention and protention both belong to the sphere of the *primordial* ('in the broad sense'), whereas secondary memory (*Wiedererinnerung*) does not. Accordingly, absolute certainty can exclusively be ascribed to the former, whereas the latter only provides us with relative certainty. In Derrida's view, the force with which he upholds the above distinctions betrays Husserl's unease at this issue. It is due to his attempt to bring together two apparently irreconcilable strands of his thought. A) The living now cannot be the absolute perceptual source without reference to retention taken as non-perception. This is the insight Husserl gains by his analysis of experience. B) The source of certitude is fundamentally the primordial character of the living now. Consequently, it is necessary to keep retention within the sphere of primordial certitude so as to safeguard its epistemological significance. It follows from this that the boundary between the primordial and the non-primordial needs to be redrawn. It cannot pass between the pure present and the non-present – as that would diminish the epistemological status of retention. Rather, what needs to be distinguished are two different "forms of the re-turn or re-stitution of the present, retention and re-presentation" (*VPh*, 75). As we have seen, it is only the latter which falls outside the category of the primordial.

However, in his concluding remarks on Husserl's understanding of time, Derrida underlines the *common root* of these two forms of return. This root – which he describes as "the possibility of repetition in its most general form" and "the trace in the most universal sense" – not only inhabits the actuality of the present but *constitutes* it (*VPh*, 75). The ideality of the form of presence implies an infinite repeatability, a return of the same *ad infinitum* that is inherent in presence itself. It is exactly this irreducible bending-back (*ce pli*) in presence/self-presence which prohibits to speak about a simple self-identity in the same instant (*VPh*, 76). Thus 'solitary mental life' is entangled with time right from the beginning. The concept of pure solitude needs refinement as the very condition of its self-presence, i.e. time, undermines its original definition (*VPh*, 76f).

Speech and communication

Derrida speaks of an indefectible complicity between idealisation and speech. An ideal object can be shown an indefinite number of times, as it is not under the constraint of mundane spatiality. It is pure noema and can be expressed without passing

through the spatio-temporal realm. This is precisely where the *phenomenological voice* comes into play, as the 'phonē' is inextricably intertwined with the history of the idealisation of objects. According to Derrida, metaphysics, (the traditional western) philosophy and the determination of being as presence "constitute the epoch of speech as *technical* mastery of objective being …" (*VPh*, 84).[162] In order to understand the unity of *technē* and *phonē*, we must examine the objectivity of the object. The objectivity of the ideal object consists in its independence of the *hic et nunc* acts and events of the empirical subjectivity which intends it. Its immediate presence to intuition is free from any entanglement with the empirical world so that the re-establishment of its sense in the form of presence becomes a universal and unlimited possibility. Yet the object's ideality can only 'exist' for a non-empirical consciousness. Accordingly, it must be expressed in an element whose phenomenality has a non-empirical form too: *The voice is this element*.

Phonic signs are heard and understood by the subject who utters them in the absolute proximity of their present. That is to say, the subject does not have to pass beyond himself (*passer hors de soi*) to be immediately affected by his expressive activity. My words are "alive" (*"vives"*[163]) because they do not seem (*semblent*) to "leave me" (*quitter*); they do not seem to fall "outside me" (*hors de moi*), "outside my breath" (*hors de mon souffle*). There is no "visible distance" (*éloignement visible*) between myself and my utterances; they do not cease to belong to me (*cesser de m'appartenir*); they remain at my disposition "without accessory" (*"sans accessoire"*) (*VPh*, 85).

But, asks Derrida, is this not characteristic of the phenomenological and ideal aspect of every signifier? In writing, for example, one can distinguish between the grapheme and the empirical body of the corresponding graphic sign. Whereas the former belongs to the realm of phenomenological consciousness, the latter is of an empirical or worldly nature. This applies to all visual or spatial signifiers. What then, is *specific* to the phonic signifier? Derrida argues that every non-phonic signifier implies a spatial reference, i.e. its being-outside (*dehors*) or being-in-the-world (*dans le monde*), is an essential component of its phenomenon. In speech however, we apparently (*en apparence*) do not find anything like this. For the hypothesis of soliloquy sanctions the distinction between indication and expression only by presupposing an essential link between expression and *phonē.* There is a necessary bond between the phonic element – taken in the phenomenological sense and not as worldly sonouresness – and expression, interpreted as a signifier which is animated by the ideal presence of a meaning (*Bedeutung*).

Derrida now tries to question this apparently unique phenomenological status of the voice as regards other types of signifiers. According to him, this transcendent character of the phonic signifier is an illusion, i.e. only *appearance* (*VPh*, 86). He argues that the seeming transcendence of the voice springs form the fact that the signified, i.e. the expressed meaning (*Bedeutung*) – which has always an ideal nature –

[162] « … sont l'époque de la voix comme maîtrise *technique* de l'être-objet … ».
[163] Quotation marks in original text.

is immediately present in the act of expression. This immediate presence results from the (apparently) self-effacing character of the phonic signifier (*VPh*, 86):

> … the phenomenological "body" of the signifier seems to fade away at the very moment it is produced. It seems already to belong to the element of ideality. It phenomenologically reduces itself, transforming the worldly opacity of its body into pure diaphaneity. This effacement of the sensible body and its exteriority is *for consciousness* the very form of the immediate presence of the signified.

Why is there such a complicity between sound, or better, voice, and ideality? When I speak, I can hear myself *at the same time* that I speak. The signifier animated by the meaning-intention (*Bedeutungsintention)* remains wholly present to me. The live-giving act (*l'acte qui donne vie*) which transforms the body of the signifier into a meaningful expression does not lose its self-presence. It does not lose its purity by animating the body of the signifier which belongs to the visible and spatial realm. Rather, it can show the ideal object or the ideal meaning (*Bedeutung*) to which it relates without falling outside the ideality and self-presence (*VPh*, 87).

The event of 'hearing-oneself-speak' is thus a unique kind of auto-affection. First, it occurs in a universal sphere in which what appears as signified must be of an ideal nature, i.e. indefinitely repeatable and transmissible as the same. Secondly, the subject can speak and hear himself speak and being affected by what he says without passing through an external world which is not 'his own'. In other words, the voice meets no obstacles in its going forth, precisely because it is pure auto-affection. It is this purity which makes it apt for universality, and it is the latter which determines that there is no consciousness without the voice. For the voice is present to itself in the form of universality and constitutes consciousness. Derrida even goes so far as to *identify* the voice with consciousness: "La voix *est* la conscience" (*VPh*, 89).

Derrida then turns to *colloquy* which is particularly important for the purpose of this essay. It turns out that there is no 'real communication' at all. Here again the generation of signs does not *seem* to meet any obstacles as it only brings together two phenomenological origins of pure auto-affection. To speak to someone is to hear *oneself* speak. But at the same time, one is heard by *another*. Now, following Husserl's understanding of speech, one must say that to speak to another "is to make the other *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I produced it. That is to say, the immediate repetition reproduces the auto-affection without the help of anything external" (*VPh*, 89). This possibility of repetition and reproduction "*gives itself out* (*se donne*) as the phenomenon of mastery or limitless power (*pouvoir sans limite*) over the signifier since the signifier itself has the form of what is not external" (*VPh*, 89f).[164] Put differently, if speech would really work as Husserl suggests, there were no distance between the signifier and the signified. Due to its absolute proximity to the signified – which is aimed at in intuition and which carries the meaning –, the signifier would become *perfectly diaphanous*. Once again, this proximity would not occur if instead of hearing myself speak,

[164] „Parler à quelqu'un, c'est sans doute s'entendre parler, être entendu de soi, mais aussi et du même coup, si l'on est entendu de l'autre, faire que celui-ci *répète immédiatement* en soi le s'entendre-parler dans la forme même où je l'ai produit. Le répète immédiatement, c'est-a-dire reproduise l'auto-affection pure sans le secours d'aucune extériorité" (*VPh*, 89).

I would see myself write or gesture, since then, the detour through the outward world would destroy the above outlined proximity and immediacy (*VPh*, 90).

The Addressee in Barth

I shall now discuss Barth's understanding of *speech* and its *reception* by the addressee against the background of the above account of Derrida's interpretation of Husserl's first *Logical Investigation*. Similar to Husserl, Barth resorts to speech and orality in order to conceive of an ideal act of communication that is free from spatio-temporal contaminations. Once again, from the perspective of the sender, to speak "is to make the other *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-onself-speak in the very form in which I produce it. That is to say, the immediate repetition reproduces the auto-affection without the help of everything external" (*VPh*, 89). In Barth, this notion is theologically motivated, and is supposed to solve the problem of how an *infallible* God can *infallibly* speak to *fallible* human beings. Yet, since not just the addressee but also the *speaker* is fallible (i.e. finite and fallen), Barth faces an additional problem: It does not suffice just to envisage ideal speech-acts that convey ideal meanings. Rather, divine intervention must be thought of in such a way that also the human fallibility of the sender can be (temporarily) overcome. This latter issue was discussed in the preceding chapter which investigated the encoding of the message.

For the sake of comprehensiveness it must be stressed that, for the purpose of this essay, nothing depends on whether Derrida's account (and critique) of Husserl's First *Logical Investigation* is correct.[165] All that matters here is that the conception of speech set out by Derrida in his critique of Husserl helps to grasp the structure of Barth's idea of revelation. Likewise, it is not necessary to accept Derrida's radical claim that the whole western history of philosophy fell prey to a metaphysics of presence associated with logocentrism.

Time: recollection and expectation

The following key passage clearly recalls Husserl's discussion about the undivided unity of the temporal present and the difference between protention and retention (primary memory) and representation (secondary memory). This is not to say, of course, that Barth's own reflections on time and revelation can be equated with Husserl's philosophy. On the contrary, Barth is to a certain extent an even more radical phenomenologist than Husserl. As Derrida points out, the fact that Husserl allows for non-presence and otherness to be internal to presence questions in principle the axiomatic principle of phenomenology.[166] Accordingly, analysing Husserl's idea of

[165] Jean-Luc Marion, for instance, denies this and criticises Derrida for wrongly subordinating the *Sixth* to the *First Logical Investigation*. Following Husserl, he points out that the *Sixth Investigation* is the most important one to understand phenomenology, J.-L. Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 10. Drawing a distinction between the categorical *givenness* of Being and presentifying intuition Marion argues that "the breakthrough of the *Investigations* completes the "metaphysics of presence" by broadening intuition to the point that it manages, in an echo of Nietzsche's "great *Amen*", to place the totality of beings in presence", ibid., 19.

[166] "Am *Prinzip aller Prinzipien: dass jede originär gebende Anschauung eine Rechtsquelle der Erkenntnis* sei, dass *alles, was sich uns in der "Intuition" originär*, (sozusagen in seiner leibhaften Wirklichkeit) *darbietet, einfach hinzunehmen sei, als was es sich gibt*, aber auch *nur in den*

time (primarily) in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, he raises a number of questions all of which tend to undermine the very foundation of phenomenology. If the presence of the present cannot be thought of without the bending-back of a return and the movement of repetition, if difference (or 'the trace') always precedes presence, Husserl's use of the terms 'self-identity' and 'solitary mental life' as well as his rigorous separation of indication from expression becomes obsolete (*VPh*, 76f). This, according to Derrida, seems to follow from Husserl's distinction between primary and secondary memory. In the *Prolegomena* however, it is difficult to find signs of an equivalent development. Of course, Barth emphasises that revelation (here understood as divine presence in the orally proclaimed Word) takes place ever and ever again so that we can always look backward (recollection) and forward (expectation) to past and future divine interventions respectively. But this is not to say that non-presence, difference and alterity are internal to presence, since in Barth, these acts of revelation are conceived in terms of the "self-identity of the now as point; as a 'source-point'" (*point-source*) (*VPh*, 69).

> [Scripture as the] Word of God is present [in proclamation] in a way we *cannot conceive*: not as a third time between past and future, between recollection and expectation, but as that point between the two which we cannot think of as time, which when it is considered immediately becomes once more either before of after. In this way it is the being present of the *eternal* word, which is constitutive for its expectation and recollection, on which our time is based, just as the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the centre of time is the basis of time in general (*KD* I/2, 589, cf. 534).

The first question that needs to be answered is: In what way is the orally proclaimed Word of God (i.e. the tertiary sacrament) present in time so that this presence can be *compared to* the manner in which Jesus Christ (i.e. the primary sacrament) is the 'centre and basis of time in general'? So far as the latter is concerned, Husserlian punctuality is evidently not a suitable thought-category to describe the nature of divine presence in the life of Christ. For Barth holds that in Jesus Christ, God as *Deus praesens* has time for us and this implies human and temporal, i.e. diachronic presence: "'The Word' became flesh also means: 'the Word became time'" (*KD* I/2, 55). Revelation in Christ is – even though not exclusively – the *lifetime of a man*, i.e. the 30 years of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a section of *world-history* (*KD* I/2, 55, 64). As *fulfilled* time, the presence of God in Jesus Christ divides our time into *old* and *new* time. Revelation means the *terminus a quo* as well as the *terminus ad quem* of the event of Jesus Christ, the veiledness of the Word of God in him as well as the breaking through of this veil in virtue of his self-unveiling. The veil is the old or general time insofar as Christ assumes it and transforms it into his new time – which is the act of unveiling (*KD* I/2, 61f). Revelation or fulfilled time is thus the transition from the old aeon, which ends with the cross, to the new aeon, which starts with the resurrection, and coincides with the transition from the New Testament to the Old Testament. The new time which *already* exists thereby triumphs over the old time which *still* exists. Consequently, the Old Testament time is qualified as the time of expectation and the New Testament time as the time of recollection.

Schranken, in denen es sich da gibt, kann uns keine erdenkliche Theorie irre machen", E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie*, § 24.

But how does that bear on Barth's conception of divine presence in the orally proclaimed Word? How are we to understand that our time is based on the presence of the orally proclaimed Word "*just as* the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the centre of time is the basis of time in general" (*KD* I/2, 589, italics mine)? For as Barth himself explains, the incarnate Christ does *enter* time, i.e. he is present in a diachronic mode. And it is precisely this diachronic mode which does *not* apply to the presence of the orally proclaimed Word. But perhaps the point of comparison lies rather in the *structuring function* of these respective presences, in the sense that they both give rise to recollection and expectation. Just as the incarnate Christ divides history into the period of expectation (the time of the Old Testament, which looks forward to the coming of the Messiah) and the period of recollection (the time of the New Testament, which looks back to the revelatory event in Jesus Christ), thus the preached Word of God points back to the preceding divine self-manifestation through human proclamation and evokes hope for future divine – but ecclesiastically mediated – revelation.

And there is a further parallel between these two levels. One looks in vain for an account of the arrival of the 'new aeon', the 'fulfilled time', in which the unveiling of the old time in Christ coincides with a *de- and restructuration* of the existing cultural codes (cf. part I, 2, C). If this were the case, the (gradual) triumph of the new over the old time (which is still present) would then result in a new interpretative practice. But Barth explains that even if Jesus Christ is indeed the light of the new time in the midst of the old time, this "cannot mean that we are in a position to see through (*durchschauen*) and understand (*verstehen*) any part of this old time as new, fulfilled time" (*KD* I/2, 64, cf. 66). Consequently, God's revelation in Jesus Christ does not really initiate into a new way of perceiving worldly phenomena on this macro-level of time, but at best points forward to a further divine intervention at the second coming of Christ. It thus turns out that the diachronic-durative presence of God in the life of Jesus Christ is only an 'extended punctuality' and fails to establish a lasting divine indwelling in Church and creation mediated by human beings.

Similarly, on the micro-level of time, recollections and expectations resulting from the tertiary sacrament could be interpreted within the framework of a diachronic-durative approach. This would again lead to a directed serialisation of the kind x is y_1, y_2, y_3, y_4 and so forth, in the sense that the *redemptive* transition from y_1 to y_2 to y_3 to y_4 etc. is the fruit of the *new* time. Thus the above statement that 'the being present of the eternal word is constitutive for its expectation and recollection' could be interpreted as follows: the old (and the new) time is 'manifest' when I look back from y_n to y_{n-1} (recollection) and the new time when I look forward from y_n to the next interpretation y_{n+1} (expectation). The strength of this diachronic-durative model is that creation is conceived of being in a continuous state of transformation and that it does do justice to human *fallibility* and *finitude*. As far as human fallibility is concerned, it is clear that this process of transformation does not imply the naïve view of a linear, eschatological 'progress' without twists and turns, but very well allows for shifts, breaks and detours. As far as human *finitude* is concerned, the sender who interprets x as y only requires limited, i.e. finite expertise in order to per-

form his interpretation. That is to say, every interpretation can be infinitely refined, since diachrony opens up the possibility of improving on the initial interpretation of *x* as *y*. Furthermore, every construal of *x* as *y*, and every transition from y_1 to y_2 is philosophically speaking perspectival and therefore does take into account that every interpretation is performed by a finite mind that is not able to perceive the world from a god's-eye view. From a theological perspective, the provisional character of every act of knowledge and interpretation is due to the eschatological reserve which necessarily qualifies all human action.

But the above quotation makes it abundantly clear that this is not what Barth has in mind. The speech-act is thought of as taking place in the 'blinking of an eye', i.e. without temporal extension, conveying an ideal meaning that remains self-identical in the act of communication and which is passively received by the addressee. This leads to the issue of *mediation*.

Logocentrism and the question of mediation

To be sure, according to Barth, divine presence *is* mediated by signs. The threefold form of the Word of God comprises a human being (Jesus of Nazareth), graphic signifiers (Scripture) and phonic signifiers (oral proclamation). Additionally, one could mention the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper, which do not play an important role in the *Prolegomena* compared to the extensive discussion of divine speech. This mediation by creaturely signs is supposed to overcome the dichotomy of realism and idealism, as Barth repeatedly points out, because mediation by signs does not mean that we *only* have the sign instead of the 'thing itself', since the 'thing itself' is present and active *in* the signs (cf. *KD* I/2, 555).

Nonetheless, the 'last' link in the chain of signs, the site where divine revelation is supposed to unfold its innovative and transformative force is the *orally* proclaimed Word. Barth explicitly underlines the intellectual and spiritual nature of the divine Word: the Word of God "is primarily spiritual, and *after that* and *in that form*, in this its spirituality, for the sake of it and without prejudice to it, *also* a corporeal or natural event" (*KD* I/1, 139).

Similar to (Derrida's) Husserl, Barth's ideal is that of a 'pure expression' – free of any spatio-temporal contingencies – that cannot dispense with the notion of an *undivided unity of the temporal present*.[167] In line with his predecessors in the Reformed tradition, he resorts to speech and privileges phonic signifiers, since their sensibility apparently fades away at the very moment of their utterance, thus seemingly giving way to an immediate presence of the signified. This preference for oral communica-

[167] Apart from the quotation discussed above, there are innumerable other passages in the *Prolegomena* where divine revelation is described in terms of a punctual event (*Ereignis*): *Scripture* (in the act of revelation) (*KD* I/1, 112, 116, 275; I/2, 514, 589); *faith* (*KD* I/1, 277; I/2, 791); *Church doctrine*: "Pure doctrine is an event" (*KD* I/2, 859); *commanding and obeying* (*KD* I/1, 290); *Church proclamation* (*KD* I/1, 96f, 104); revelation in *Jesus Christ*: an unrepeatable and unique event of the past (*KD* I/1, 118; I/2, 54). Yet, as shown above, as far as divine presence in Jesus Christ is concerned, Barth's use of the event-category does entail the notion of temporal extension; *spiritual* and *physical events* (*Geschehen*) (Jesus Christ, Scripture, proclamation) (*KD* I/1, 138f); as regards the 'contingent' contemporaneousness occurring between Scripture and addressee (*KD* I/1, 154).

tion is theologically motivated and seeks to answer the question of how the *eternal* divine will can be recognised within the *spatio-temporal* realm, without reducing God to a finite object. The nature of oral communication seems to solve this problem. Due to the apparent ideality and diaphaneity of phonic signifiers, an immediacy can be achieved which is supposed to bypass the contingent conditions of human communication in space and time. To quote Derrida once again: to speak to another "is to make the other *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I produced it. That is to say, the immediate repetition reproduces the auto-affection without the help of anything external" (*VPh*, 89).

To be sure, the production of phonic signifiers is always tied to the preacher so that human mediation can never be entirely excluded; but the intention is to keep it at least to a *minimum*. For the function of this model of revelation is by no means just to guarantee that a *human* speech-act can be ideally conveyed, but that *God's* command reaches its creaturely addressees without distortion. This last point is borne out by the fact that Barth often stresses the *difference* between the content of divine and human speech in the act of communication (see part II, 2). Yet as I shall try to show, to conceive of the relationship between divine and human action in such a way, leads to major problems, since the postulated *ideality* of the speech-act clashes with the scarcely deniable *finitude* and *fallenness* of the human sender and addressee.

Barth's preference for phonic signifiers also accounts for his reluctance to accept Tillich's statements that "*Verbum* is more than *oratio*. That is what Protestantism has largely forgotten. *Verbum*, the Word of revelation, may (!) be in everything in which spirit expresses itself, also in the silent symbols of art, also in the works of society and law. And therefore a Church must be able to speak in all these forms" (cf. *KD* I/1, 64).[168] Yet this way of thinking is nonetheless not entirely foreign to the Swiss theologian. In a lengthy small print section in which he discusses the nature of the sacrament as *signum visibile* and *symbolum externum*, Barth goes so far as to say that the sacrament is more suitable than the word to express the truth of the Johannine verse 'the Word became flesh' (Joh 1:14) (*KD* I/2, 251).[169]

The best way of checking whether the above comparison between Barth and Husserl does make sense is to analyse the act of reception in greater detail. That is to say we need to take a closer look at *receiver-related* issues. To be sure, there *is* a pragmatic aspect in Barth's notion of revelation. The only question is whether his pragmatics does do justice to the insights provided by Peirce and Eco. What are these insights?

Pragmatic factors

a) *Interpretation*:[170] This first point recalls the diachronic aspect outlined in part I and is indispensable for the understanding of meaning in all pragmatic theories. Ac-

[168] Barth quotes P. Tillich, *Kirche und Kultur*, 44f. Exclamation mark added by Barth.
[169] Yet here too, the question arises of whether Barth's understanding of the sacramental sign does do justice to Peirce triadic understanding of semiosis. Cf. M. Vetter, *Zeichen Deuten auf Gott*, 149ff, 248f.
[170] I am following U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 212-219.

cording to Peirce's notion of infinite semiosis, every expression must be interpreted by another expression ad infinitum (cf. *CP* 2.303, 2.92). Consequently, the content of an expression can only be defined in and through the activity of interpretation. This results in an accumulation of meanings due to the various contexts and circumstances in which expressions are interpreted – provided the meanings produced are socially recognised so that they become part of the code of a linguistic community. The complete meaning of a sign is therefore "the historical record of the pragmatic labor that has accompanied every contextual instance of it".[171] Accordingly, the ideal interpreter of a sign foresees all the possible contexts and circumstances in which it can be inserted, thus doing justice to the accumulative and dynamic force of the sign. Every term is a potential text, and every text a potential argument.

b) *Contexts and circumstances*: Contextual and circumstantial factors disambiguate the polysemic meaning of a sememe and determine which denotations and connotations apply under such and such circumstances and in such and such a context. The *contextual* aspect concerns those sememes which are contextually associated with the sememe under consideration, and which are therefore immediately relevant to its understanding. For instance, in the text /Two roads lead to John's house. One way goes trough the woods. The other is shorter. Both are paved and he knows them very well/, /he/ refers to /John/, /them/ refers to /two roads/ and /way/ refers to /roads/, etc. *Circumstantial* factors encompass the relevant sign-vehicles that belong to other semiotic systems and/or other uncoded events or entities which occur along with the sign-vehicle under investigation.[172] Although the actual disambiguation of a sememe takes place in real contexts and circumstances, the most important selections which are relevant to the process of disambiguation can often be foreseen. Accordingly, these selections can to a certain degree be represented in a compositional tree.[173]

c) *Background knowledge*: The above analysis of the interpretative act '*s* (= sender) interprets (or sets) *x* as *y* to *a* (= addressee) in the context *c*', did not take into account sufficiently the 'post-modern' insight that communication and interpretative processes often suffer from the fragmentation and heterogeneity of our contemporary world, which may drive a wedge between sender and addressee. It cannot be denied "that the coincidence of codes between transmitter and transmittee is in reality possible only to a very relative extent".[174] If one adheres to the idea of an ideal transmission of invariant messages conveyed by an artificial language, this must represent a disturbing factor. Due to the non-identical codes of the encoder and decoder, there results a creative surplus of meaning in the act of reception which threatens the ideal of rigid communication. According to an alternative view however, "the creative function is a universal quality of language and poetic language is regarded as the most typical manifestation of language as such".[175]

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[171] U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 214.
[172] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 105-108.
[173] See the examples in ibid., 105, 113f, 118, 120.
[174] Y.M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 13.
[175] Ibid., 17.

Now to decide whether the reception of a message is to be considered negatively as 'noise' or positively as a 'creative surplus' depends on a number of factors such as the genre of the text/message, the circumstances in which the act of communication takes place, the interpretative community which the interlocutors belong to, the consequences which follow from this interpretation and so forth. In any case, there cannot be general rules to assess whether an act of communication has been successful or not. Nonetheless, it is imperative for the Christian community to establish specific guidelines for different interpretative aims, as well as to institute sophisticated procedures in order to assess the resulting interpretations on a meta-level. It goes without saying that this second-order procedures are not anchored in an extra-linguistic reality but are themselves subject to the contingencies of all linguistic practices. Nonetheless, they enhance the complexity of the interpretative process and thus fulfil a control function which reduces the danger of misinterpretation.

I shall now turn to a more detailed analysis of acts of communication, with particular attention to the often diverging background knowledges of the sender and addressee. In other words, I am taking up the discussion about Abel's differentiation between interpretation$_{1/2/3}$ insofar as these different levels can be regarded as background knowledges of communicative processes. For the sake of simplicity, I shall confine myself here to Eco's distinction between private and communal codes.

The background knowledge of a person consists, semiotically speaking, of a set of different codes and subcodes. The code, or hyper-code, links up various sub-codes, "some of which are strong and stable, while others are weak and transient, such as a lot of peripheral connotative couplings".[176]

In order to analyse processes of communication and interpretation, Eco distinguishes between the operations of overcoding and undercoding, which he interprets in terms of Peirce's abduction (*CP* 2.623ff).[177] In the case of logical deduction, a result is deduced from a rule and a case. For instance: all the beans from this bag are white; these beans are from this bag; these beans are white. In the case of induction, a rule is inferred from a case and a result. For instance: these beans are from this bag; these beans are white; all the beans from this bag are white (probably). In the case of abduction or hypothesis, a case is inferred from a rule and a result. For instance: all the beans from this bag are white; these beans are white; these beans are from this bag (probably). Now overcoding and undercoding can be seen as two different hypothetical movements which Peirce subsumed under the heading of abduction.

In the case of overcoding, a new subcode is proposed on the basis of a pre-established code, which governs "a rarer application of the previous rule".[178] Eco refers to the following example of Peirce:

> I once landed at a seaport in a Turkish province; and, as I was walking up to the house which I was to visit, I met a man upon horseback, surrounded by four horsemen holding a canopy over his head. As the governor of the province was the only personage I could think of who would be so greatly honoured, I inferred that this was he. This was an hypothesis (*CP* 2.625).

[176] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 125.
[177] Ibid., 131ff. Cf. U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 39-43.
[178] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 133.

In analysing this quotation, it becomes clear that this abductional movement was based on an already existing sign-function. Peirce already knew that the sign-vehicle /canopy over the head/ meant «honour». Yet, what he did not know, was that a canopy was the ritual sign characteristic of a Turkish governor. Peirce therefore invented a general rule by assigning to /canopy/ the yet uncoded denotation «governor». This creative act can be seen as the first step in the production of a new sign-function which may alter or enrich the prevailing code. But it is only a first step, since the positive reception and repeated use of this new sign-function does not depend on its inventor but on the society and linguistic community which he is part of. However, very often, overcoded entities remain on the threshold between convention and innovation. Undercoding, however[179]

> … may be defined as the operation by means of which in the absence of reliable pre-established rules, certain macroscopic portions of certain texts are provisionally assumed to be pertinent units of a code in formation, even though the combinational rules governing the more basic compositional items of the expressions, along with the corresponding content-units, remain unknown.

Suppose somebody travels to a foreign country whose language he does not know. Step by step he will begin to understand some basic elements. To be sure, grammatical and stylistic subtleties will remain unknown for a long time. Yet, after a while, he might be able to ascribe to certain linguistic expressions – often in connection with reoccurring patterns of behaviour, gestures, visual and (non-linguistic) acoustic signs – a very general meaning. Perhaps he will come to the conclusion that "when accompanied by a smile, an expression like /I love you/, /I like you/, /I am fond of you/, /I adore you/, /Hi man!/, /Hello my friend!/ and /How are you?/, roughly mean «friendship»".[180] This kind of inference is an act of undercoding, i.e. the interpreter proceeds tentatively from non-existent codes to potential and/or rudimentary codes. Yet, as Eco points out, in most common cases of sign-production and interpretation, the activity of undercoding is closely intertwined with that of overcoding so that it is often very difficult to distinguish clearly between these two movements. For this reason he subsumes both of them under the umbrella term *extra-coding*.

Now how far can the activity of extra-coding help us understand processes of communication and interpretation? Very often there are phrases or even discourses which one has already experienced in similar contexts and circumstances so that there is no need to interpret and decode them. In other words, communication would be inconceivable without certain redundancy rules. Thus the addressee "is continuously anticipating expressions, filling up the empty spaces in a text with the missing units, forecasting a lot of words that the interlocutor may have said, could have said, will certainly say, or has never said".[181] This wide range of institutionalised knowledge covers all elements which we take for granted in communicative interaction.

But since there is a multiplicity of codes, subcodes, contexts and circumstances, one and the same message can often be decoded from different perspectives and according to different interpretative conventions so that the text must be regarded as an

[179] Ibid., 135f.
[180] Ibid., 135.
[181] Ibid., 136.

"*empty form to which can be attributed various possible senses*".[182] Thus the perennial hermeneutical question arises according to which criteria it is possible to distinguish between acts of creative reception and aberrations. I shall later come back to this issue.

Sometimes the basic denotations may be conveyed successfully, whereas the connotations inferred from the text by the addressee may deviate from those of the author. However, Eco gives an extreme example in which even the basic denotations differ for sender and receiver, even if the message is meaningful in both cases: the sentence */i vitelli dei romani sono belli/* can either be read in Latin and then means «Go Vitellius, to the sound of war of the Roman god», or in Italian as «the calves of the Romans are beautiful».[183] Although contextual and circumstantial factors should normally enable the addressee to determine whether the sentence is to be decoded in Latin or Italian, the above quotation nonetheless exemplifies the polysemic nature of every message. As the message articulated by the sender represents a selection of equiprobable symbols out of a sign-system, it then becomes itself in turn a source or expression of equiprobable contents. In other words, due to the various possible readings of the sememes along with the range of contextual and circumstantial interpretations, the addressee faces multiple choices to follow a path in the compositional tree. Consequently, the information of the messages is only reduced when the addressee selects one particular interpretation out of a wide variety of different possibilities. Aesthetic messages constitute an exception in this respect, as they "require the simultaneous grasping of multiple senses" so that the "informational quality of the message remains *unreduced*".[184]

Furthermore, as already outlined in the first chapter, it is helpful to distinguish between the private and communal codes of the sender, and the private and communal codes of the addressee. The communal codes stand for a person's world-view, ideology, or religious orientation etc., the private codes cover the individual differences, which occur among people who share a common world-view or ideology, etc.[185] Divergences between interlocutors on the level of communal codes, and divergences on the level of private codes give rise to quite different communicational problems and aberrations. On the level of communal codes, divergences remain irreducible and irreconcilable – if one abstracts from the possibility of 'conversion', i.e. from the fact that the addressee can change his world-view or religion on the basis of the message addressed to him. However, some clarificatory work may be necessary to reach the interlocutors' 'bedrocks', i.e. their most fundamental beliefs. This might be important in order to distinguish real disagreements from merely apparent disagreements. The interlocutors may thus reach a point where they can see clearly why they cannot understand each other, or why they do not agree.

d) *Context-change and transformation of the sign-system*: So far the emphasis was placed on the question of how the message emitted by the sender can be decoded

[182] Ibid., 139.
[183] Ibid., 140.
[184] Ibid.
[185] This distinction roughly corresponds to what Abel calls interpretation$_1$ and interpretation$_{2+3}$.

intelligibly by the addressee – in a context which may differ considerably from that of the sender. The context within which the transmitted message is interpreted (by the addressee) was thereby regarded as something more or less static. However, in actual fact, every context is in a state of constant flux, i.e. the utterance/text whose meaning depends on the context, also alters the context. So much so that the contextual changes induced by an utterance not only affect the interpretation of the following utterances but also the "overall meaning of the very utterance responsible for the contextual change".[186]

Furthermore, the notion of context remains rather fuzzy, for it is in principle the whole sign-system (Eco) or interpretative practice and horizon (Abel) against which an utterance/text is interpreted, bordering on sociolinguistics, social science and cultural studies. Now so far as the transformation of a sign-system is concerned, one has to distinguish between the genres of text, discourses, artefacts and institutions which *initiate* and *give rise to* transformation, and the wide variety of genres of text, communicative practices, artefacts and institutions that *result* from this transformation. The former category is highly specific and its hermeneutical function is to change the semantic system, i.e. "to change the way in which culture 'sees' the world".[187] Yet the question of which hermeneutical devices can best fulfil this function leads away from an understanding of divine speech as a concrete act of interpretation. Hence discussion of this issue will follow in part III.

After this brief survey of logocentrism and pragmatics, it is now time to analyse the divine speech-act as it occurs on the basis of Church proclamation in a more comprehensive way, by relating all of the factors outlined above to each other. I shall try to show that Barth's conception of divine revelation and human reception tends towards a *dangerous subjectivism*.

c) Divine presence and authority

On the one hand, Barth analyses the divine speech-act from a *theocentric perspective* and points out that the divine address and its reception by the addressee are *two aspects of one single divine act.* Within *human* speech it is possible to distinguish between act and 'mere words'. Whereas a 'mere word' is only the self-utterance of a person, an act also entails "the relative alteration in the environment which proceeds from it" (*KD* I/1, 149). A mere word is passive, an act, however, actively participates in history. Yet these distinctions do not hold as regards the Word of God, for God's words are never simply 'mere words' but always acts. Whenever we speak of the Word of God, we must speak of its power, its might, its operations and the *changes it effects* (*KD* I/1, 157).

This theocentric statement about the infallible efficacy of the divine Word corresponds to Barth's *anthropocentric* presupposition that knowledge of God is always certain and clear (*KD* I/1, 256). "True knowledge of God is not and cannot be attacked; it is without anxiety and without doubt" (*KD* II/, 5). On the one hand, this

[186] F. Recanati, *Pragmatics*, 627.
[187] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 274.

quotation can be taken as a statement about the 'existential certainty of faith'. This would amount to saying that faith is the belief in the non-arbitrary, i.e. specifically Christian interpretability of the world on the synchronic and diachronic level that cannot be lost however many times we come to realise that we *mis*interpreted it. In *this* sense, knowledge of God is indeed without anxiety and without doubt. But this conviction does not imply that there is a particular type of context, namely Church services, within which *single* speech-acts performed by a *single* sender become an infallible mouthpiece of God by a mysterious divine intervention. In other words, if we read the above quotation in connection with Barth's account of divine speech as a 'concrete act of interpretation' (which is admittedly unfavourable, but nonetheless tenable), serious problems arise which require further discussion.[188] To put it crudely, it remains unclear how 'infallible' speech-acts can be received by 'fallible' human addressees. It seems inevitable that Barth's theocentric statement about the unity of God's words and acts, as well as his anthropocentric point about the certainty and clarity of every experience of God come to serve *as criteria for the recognition* of the Word of God *as* Word of God – as opposed to mere *human* words. Thus from the perspective of the addressee, the union between word and act takes on the form of a *self-evident presentation* to his or her mind that is free of any ambiguity and therefore acceptable without reserve (*KD* I/1, 148, cf. 256, II/1, 5).[189] As a result, divine presence can in principle be *inferred* from this experience of evidence, provided it occurs within the context of Church proclamation. But the question is whether these two criteria discussed by Barth (experience of evidence and context of Church proclamation) really suffice to guard against the *danger of subjectivism*. This is clearly not the case, as I shall try to show.

Of course, following Simon, Peirce and Eco, there are no 'objective' criteria according to which the chain of interpretations can be brought to an end. Consequently, the transition from a sign to an action-sign remains inevitably 'subjective' insofar as the interpreter (or addressee) acts if he *believes* he has understood correctly. And it would be unintelligible and nonsensical to look for a more secure foundation for decision-making. Thus the event of coming to understand something one has hitherto not understood (fully) always occurs in the form of an experience of evidence, which enables the addressee to act. Yet in order to avoid arbitrary interpretations and subjectivism, more attention needs to be paid to the context within which these experiences of evidence happen. To be sure, unlike Wolterstorff for instance[190], Barth does define this context very narrowly. Divine speech understood as a tertiary sacrament is always based on the secondary sacrament of Scripture, which is in turn based on

[188] If one interprets this statement in terms of the unshakable existential certainty of faith, however, it leads away from what I called a 'literal' understanding of divine speech. This second interpretation will not be considered here but is the main theme in part III of this essay.

[189] "We might, for example, hear Christian sermons preached and ask ourselves: what happens in virtue of the fact that this thing happens? To what do all these words refer to in reality? A question that most certainly needs raising! We might listen to Holy Scripture and hear only words, a man's words, which we do or do not understand, but along with which invariably the corresponding event is still wanting. It is then sure that in the proclamation as in the Bible what we heard was not the Word of God" (*KD* I/1, 148).

[190] N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 273ff.

the primary sacrament of the incarnate Logos, and the interconnection between these three elements is only guaranteed in Church proclamation. Yet a closer analysis reveals that Barth's criteria do not suffice to avert the danger of subjectivism.

It is possible to distinguish between different types of 'hermeneutical situations', some of which may entail a greater risk of misunderstanding than others. This is not to mistakenly adopt the view that an observer can assume an *external* standpoint from which he can assess whether speaker-intentions are successfully communicated to the addressee. It is not possible for finite minds to compare the background-knowledge of the sender with that of the addressee so that we know in advance if communication will be successful or not. Nonetheless, it *is* possible to develop (further) criteria – on the basis of a detailed contextual analysis – by means of which we can judge the likelihood of successful communication. In paying close attention to these contextual factors, the risk of misunderstanding can at least be minimised. Once again, this is not to say that the inevitably 'subjective' element in any process of decision-making will be eliminated. The addressee always acts when a particular interpretation of *x* as *y* has become evident to him or her.

Recalling the short list of pragmatic factors in the preceding chapter, it is evident that the unavoidably *active* and *creative* character of most acts of decoding poses a threat to successful communication. To be sure, what really counts as a *mis*understanding depends on the genre of text. As outlined above, the aesthetic text, for instance, is not designed to be completely disambiguated but requires "the simultaneous grasping of multiple senses".[191] At the other end of the spectrum there are elements of *institutionalised knowledge*, i.e. phrases or discourses which follow redundancy rules so that they do not need to be decoded each time they are uttered. But 'concrete acts of interpretation' do not fall into either of these two categories. They need to be decoded. But in what way can different contextual factors or types of communication influence the result of a communicative act? Consider the following example. In the case of a *monologic address*, the likelihood that the addressee decodes the message sent by the sender /i vitelli dei romani sono belli/ correctly, is exactly fifty percent. Furthermore, if the latter only knows *either* Italian *or* Latin he will undoubtedly interpret the received message *either* as «Go Vitellius, to the sound of war of the Roman god» *or* as «the calves of the Romans are beautiful», *without having the slightest doubts about the correctness of his interpretation*. That is to say, it will be *most evident* to the addressee that his decoding is correct. For if he knows only Italian, he simply cannot imagine that the same message could mean something completely different in Latin and vice versa. By contrast, in the case of a *dialogue*, a mutual exchange of messages or texts, the possibility of a misinterpretation can be eliminated by one single question and answer.[192] Surely, Eco's example is extreme and hardly representative of the subtle nuances of everyday communication. But it nonetheless shows nicely how often *hidden* presuppositions can influence the decoding of a message. And it is precisely these hidden presuppositions that Barth's her-

[191] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 140.
[192] I shall elaborate on this issue in the following chapter.

meneutics does not take into account sufficiently. According to him, divine revelation is so powerful that it effects its own 'infallible' and 'passive' reception on the part of the addressee. All questions regarding active reception become irrelevant. But the Christian understanding of revelation does not require that general pragmatic insights are disregarded in such as way. In actual fact, Barth's emphasis on passive reception *backfires* in the sense that his *theological authoritarianism* turns into an *anthropological subjectivism*. Yet for a consistently Trinitarian and Christological theology it is neither possible nor necessary to bypass the inevitably contingent factors of every act of reception in the way conceived by Barth. Quite the reverse: Incarnation means that divine presence restructures all aspects of *human* life, i.e. it does *not* upset the finite conditions of interpretation and communication.

It is important to mark off the 'passivity' referred to above, from passivity understood in the sense of *inactivity*, or *lack of response*. Barth often emphatically rejects the idea of a partial or total passivity as regards the reception of the divine Word and underlines the need for *obedience* (*KD* I/1, 209). Only the doer of the Word of God is its real hearer (*KD* I/2, 886, cf. 898f, 945). "… [T]he man who really knows the Word of God […] can only regard himself as one who exists in his *action*, in his self-determination" (*KD* I/1, 209). The Word of God comes as a *summons* to the Christian and no neutral attitude is possible besides the right hearing of *obedience* and the wrong hearing of *disobedience*.

Yet even an order must be considered a 'question', to which obedience and non-obedience are two possible *answers*. If an order would not be viewed as a question, it would fall into the category of causality, i.e. the order would be a cause and the change brought about by it an effect. Yet an order is only understood *as* an order if it is *first* understood as a question.[193] Thus the rule that every message is an "*empty form to which can be attributed various possible senses*", also applies to this type of communication.[194] Here too, the private and communal codes of the addressee come into play, which may be very different from that of the sender. Barth does *not* say that the recipient is not supposed to *respond* to the divine call. Rather, as already indicated above, the 'passivity' that is problematic concerns his neglect of the addressee's background knowledge, which – if one takes into account the whole context within which the speech-act occurs – may lead to a *theologically legitimised subjectivism*. This assertion now needs to be further substantiated.

a) *The encoding of the message by the sender*: Due to his belief in the self-explanatory and self-authenticating character of the divine Word, Barth does not pay sufficient attention to the hermeneutical pre-understanding of the sender and the community which he belongs to (see part II, 3, B, a). As indicated above, the encoding of the message conveyed by the sender can be understood according to the formula *s interprets x as y to a in the context c*, and Scripture comes into play in the as-structure (*x* as *y*). Yet for the interpretation of *x* as *y* to be genuinely Christian, not just the text which informs this interpretative act (i.e. it needs to be Scripture and not

[193] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, 99.
[194] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 139.

another text) but also the pre-understanding embodied by the interpreter needs to meet certain theological criteria. Barth's neglect of the latter aspect, which is due to his idea of a self-revealing text, leaves the interpreter (i.e. the encoder of the message) at the mercy of the prevailing ideology. In other words, precisely *because* Scripture is implausibly supposed to 'interpret itself', the encoder will always end up uncritically adopting the currently dominating, but often hidden interpretative presuppositions, which may well run counter to the basic beliefs of the Christian community. As with the *reception* of the divine Word, Barth's seemingly most radical and uncompromisingly *theological* approach to hermeneutics relapses into a liberal model of text-interpretation.

b) *The decoding of the message by the addressee*: Barth is not sufficiently attentive to the background knowledge of the addressee. The notion of self-evidence is closely linked up with the theocentrically conceived unity between the divine Word and its effects. An experience of evidence precipitates the production of an answer-sign in the addressee, whose adequacy cannot be tested by any external and socially embodied criteria. According to Barth, such an interpersonal meta-discourse, well-known to the tradition, would threaten the absolute authority and sovereignty of God. After all, self-evidence it not regarded as a merely psychological category but rather as the locus par excellence of divine intervention – provided it occurs within the context of Church proclamation. However, Barth to a certain degree disregards the fact that every experience of evidence – even if it does occur in the 'blinking of an eye' – is not just constituted by the message communicated by the sender, but depends to a large extent on the communal and private codes of the addressee on the basis of which it is decoded.

Proclamation, as conceived by Barth, consists of *one* sender speaking to a *large number* of addressees with different background knowledges, and each recipient is supposed to be 'personally affected' in the sense that he is able to perform an action:

> … wherever and whenever God speaks to man its content [i.e. the content of God's Word] is a *concretissimum*. God always has something specific to say to each man, something that applies alone to him and to him alone (*KD* I/1, 145).

> Nothing can be made of these commands if we try to generalise and transform them into universally valid principles […] Their content is purely concrete and related to this or that particular man in this or that particular situation (*KD* II/2, 750, cf. 741).

It goes without saying that the distinction between the 'literal' and the 'non-literal' understanding of divine speech is somewhat simplistic and does not really exist in pure form. For instance, even communication that aims at formation and inculcation, and which is supposed to 'introduce into the Christian perspective on the world', still talks about 'something', i.e. about a particular *x*, since the Christian perspective or horizon of interpretation *as a whole* cannot be the subject of any talk. For instance, a sermon is dedicated to the Christian understanding of love, and the preacher tries to spell out the basic grammar of the Christian use of this term. On the other hand, the most particular interpretation of a highly specific *x* as *y* to *a* can to a certain extent be viewed as an introduction into the Christian perspective and horizon of interpretation, since every *x* could in principle be interpreted in a different way. Nonetheless, it

seems tenable to *heuristically* differentiate between these two kinds of communication since they clearly pursue different goals.

Now even the first mode of communication (introduction into the Christian perspective and horizon of interpretation) aims at a *personal* appropriation of the sent message so that on this level too, the content of the Word of God is to a certain degree a *concretissimum*. That is to say, all of the addressees will interpret the message or text conveyed by the sender in a different way, and will decode it within their individual interpretative framework. This general pragmatic insight pertains to all communication. Accordingly, it would be nonsensical to argue that this type of speech entails a particularly high risk of misunderstanding. Moreover, what distinguishes the 'non-literal' understanding of divine speech from the 'literal' one is that the former does not precipitate *immediate* action – but rather aims at a reorganisation of the addressee's *most basic interpretative categories*. This will of course, *in the long run*, influence the nature of the addressee's individual acts of interpretation as well. But the relationship between this kind of speech and single acts of interpretation is an *indirect one*. The danger of subjectivism is minimal since the reorganisation of the addressee's interpretative categories cannot be achieved by one single speech-act anyway but requires *inculcation* and *reiteration* (see part III, 2, A). Due to this diachronic dimension, it can easily be intersubjectively controlled.

It is therefore only the second mode of communication which entails an unnecessarily high risk of misunderstanding. For here, a *highly specific action* follows *immediately* from *one single speech-act*, and under conditions which do not sufficiently disambiguate the potentially 'dangerous' polysemy which lies concealed in the addressees background knowledges. But – as already indicated – since these two modes of communication do not exist in pure form, one could perhaps say that *the more concrete* an act of interpretation is, *the greater* the risk of a misapprehension and vice versa.

c) *The danger of subjectivism*: It is this double-contingency (see a and b), dangerously coupled with the notion that the reception of the the divine Word is always clear and certain, which renders Barth's understanding of divine speech prone to *subjectivism*. Whereas Husserl's exploration of orality and communication in the first *Logical Investigation* remains purely philosophical, Barth's concept of revelation must be read as a kind of *commentary on Church practice*. It therefore amounts to a kind of invitation to the addressees, *to accept uncritically their spontaneously generated interpretations and to ascribe to them the status of an infallible divine inspiration*.

In the following chapter I shall try to sketch an alternative understanding of authority which avoids the problems mentioned above.

4 An alternative understanding of authority

A) From monologue to dialogue

At the beginning of part II I defined 'literal speech' as that type of speech which terminates the chain of interpretation on the synchronic level and characterised the basic structure of this kind of communication as follows: *s (= sender) interprets (or sets) x as y to a (= addressee) in the context c*. Yet Barth's understanding of divine revelation, even if the focus is on the *correspondence* between divine and human speech (what I called the 'soteriological approach'), does not lead to a satisfactory result but rather tends towards a subjectivism. In this chapter I shall make some tentative suggestions about how the aforementioned problems could be overcome.

a) Beyond Husserl

As shown above, there are striking parallels between Barth's conception of divine revelation in the *Prolegomena* and Husserl's reflection on the human voice and expression. Once again, the basic structure of this understanding of communication can be summarised as follows:

> In colloquy, the propagation of signs does not *seem* to meet any obstacles because it brings together two *phenomenological* origins of pure auto-affection. To speak to someone is doubtless to hear oneself speak, to be heard by oneself; but at the same time, if one is heard by another, to speak is to make him *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I effectuated it. This immediate repetition is a reproduction of pure auto-affection without the help of anything external (*VPh*, 89).

The fourth chapter of *Voice and Phenomenon* is particularly important to understand Derrida's critique of what he calls Husserl's 'metaphysics of presence' – which he takes to be representative of the whole western history of philosophy. Presence has a threefold meaning in Derrida.[195] First, it denotes the presence of that which is over and against the experiencing subject and concerns object and form, i.e. that which is iterable. This first type could be called 'objective presence'. Secondly, presence means "the proximity of the self to itself in its acts …"[196] and concerns the subject and some intuition or content.[197] This second type could be called 'subjective presence'. Finally, Derrida uses presence – in the sense of the 'living presence' – as a term which comprises both the objective as well as the subjective aspect, and which is mediated by the human voice. This understanding of presence is called into question by Derrida.

In soliloquy, the locus of pure expression, I do not communicate anything to myself, i.e. I *indicate* nothing to myself.[198] And it would be purposeless for words to assume the function of indicating the existence of mental acts. Rather, in soliloquy,

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[195] L. Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl*, 2.
[196] Ibid.
[197] "… by the 'content' we understand the self-identical meaning that the hearer can grasp even if he is not a percipient" (*LU* I, § 14).
[198] And as we have seen, Husserl understands colloquy on the basis of soliloquy, rather than the other way round.

the acts are themselves experienced by us at that very moment. Thus, "… one merely conceives of (*man stellt sich vor*) oneself as speaking and communicating" (*LU* I, § 8). This statement leads Derrida to differentiate between three different meanings of *representation* (*VPh*, 54):

(a) *Vorstellung*, in the sense of *imagining* something. It is this understanding of representation which, according to Husserl, is characteristic of expression in soliloquy.

(b) *Vergegenwärtigung*, in the sense of a *re*presentation, *re*petition or *re*production of a presentation.

(c) *Stellvertreter, Repräsentation, Repräsentant*, in the sense that something stands for a *Vorstellung*.

According to Husserl, expression and inward language is merely *Vorstellung* and therefore bears an ideal character. It is only effective communication (indication), which is *real*. However, it is Derrida's aim to show that this distinction collapses. The use of words and signs always implies the threefold notion of representation outlined above. A sign is never a unique event, i.e. an "irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular" (*VPh*, 55), because a sign which took place only once would not be a sign. Every signifier must be recognisable despite the many different contexts it may enter and despite the modifications and deformations it may undergo. Although signs are indeed different each time they are involved in an utterance or inscription, there must nevertheless be a continuity of identity throughout all these various occurrences. This identity is to be thought of as *ideal* and necessarily implies representation in all three forms (*VPh*, 55f):

(a) as *Vorstellung*: the requisite for ideality in general

(b) as *Vergegenwärtigung*: the possibility of reproductive repetition in general

(c) as *Repräsentation*: insofar as each signification is a substitute for the signified as well as the ideal form of the signifier.

Once it is acknowledged that speech in general is inconceivable without representation, the difference between imaginary (expressive) and real communication (indicative) becomes problematic. By virtue of the fundamentally repetitive structure of signs in general, effective language seems to be as imaginary as imaginary speech and imaginary speech just as effective as effective speech.[199] The boundaries between the binary oppositions reality/representation, veridical/imaginary and simple presence/repetition become blurred in indication as well as in expression. But it was exactly this differentiation which gave western philosophy and history its grounding. The classical philosophy of intuition sought to save presence and attributed to the

[199] As Lawlor points out, it is incorrect to say that Derrida's "… rejection of the metaphysics of presence and of the belief in meanings as ideal unities leads him to move beyond the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology", D. Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 474. Rather, "Derrida departs from the tradition of phenomenology not because he rejects the belief in meaning as ideal unities but *because* he believes in meaning as ideal unities. For Derrida, everything depends on the Husserlian concept of the noema", L. Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl*, 236, fn 8.

sign – and with it the notions of representation and repetition – a *secondary* and *derivative* character. This move eliminated the sign and led to its obliteration.

Now Derrida aims at restoring the *original* and *non-derivative* character of signs – in opposition to classical metaphysics (*VPh*, 56f). His attempt to deconstruct the difference between real presence and presence as *Vorstellung* implies the questioning of the difference between the represented and the representative in general. Thus the following distinctions are rendered problematic: the difference between

(a) the signified and the signifier

(b) simple presence and its reproduction

(c) presentation as *Vorstellung* and *re*presentation as *Vergegenwärtigung* (for what is represented in the representation is a presentation as *Vorstellung*).

Thus, *Vorstellung* itself becomes dependent on the possibility of *re*presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*). The 'presence of the present' turns out to be a derivation from repetition rather than the other way round.

These insights lead to a deconstruction of Husserl's idea of presence. Presence can no longer be thought of without *re*presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) and now entails openness to exteriority, i.e. it is submit to *division* and *delay* (*différance*). Put differently, for every present element (that appears on the scene of presence) to be itself, an interval must separate it from that which it is not. But the same interval that constitutes it *as* present at once divides the present in and of itself, and along with it, everything that is contingent on the present, i.e. every being, above all substance and the subject. This interval which constitutes itself but also divides itself, Derrida calls *spacing*: "… the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*). And it is this constitution of the present, as an […] irreducibly non-simple […] synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protentions (to reproduce analogically and provisionally a phenomenological and transcendental language that soon will reveal itself to be inadequate), that I propose to call archi-writing, archi-trace, or *différance*".[200] The reason why retention and protention cannot be equated with the *trace* (or *différance*), lies in the fact that retention and protention denote past and future *presents* respectively, whereas the term *trace* stands for a 'past' that has never *been* and which never *will* be present. Consequently, the trace cannot be thought of "on the basis of the present, or of the presence of the present".[201]

Derrida's critique of Husserl has far-reaching consequences for communication theory and changes our understanding of the utterance as well as the reception of the speech-act.[202] What needs to be abandoned is the idea of an *exhaustively determined context* which traditionally entails the notion of the "… conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act … [and the] com-

[200] J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 13.
[201] Ibid., 21.
[202] The following account of Derrida's position is based on his dialogue with J. Searle (and J. Austin). However, as Derrida himself points out, there is a close connection between Husserl's and Searle's understanding of intentionality, J. Derrida, *Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion*, 120f.

munication of an intentional meaning …".[203] According to Derrida, it is neither plausible to believe that the sender ever says *fully* what he intended to say, nor that the addressee understands *fully* what the sender tried to communicate. That is to say there can never be a full adequation between intending and saying, saying and understanding, and intending and understanding. The structure of the mark (be it a written or oral sign) excludes even the *hypothesis* of an idealisation. It is nonsensical to presume that there could ever be an act of communication in which the 'author says what he means and the addressee understands what he says'. That is to say, the notion of ideal communication, in which the intention of the sender, the meaning of the sent message and the meaning extracted from the message by the addressee coincide, is unintelligible.[204]

Rather, for Derrida, there is a close interrelation between idealisation and *iterability* which leads back to the above discussion of representation as *Vorstellung* (imagination) and *Vergegenwärtigung* (repetition). On the one hand, iterability *makes possible* idealisation, i.e. "… a certain identity in repetition that is independent of the multiplicity of factual events …".[205] On the other hand, iterability *limits* the very idealisation it makes possible, thus "*broaching* and *breaching* it at once".[206] It is precisely the sign as *type*, i.e. that which enables us to use it as a *token* in various contexts which at once fractures and divides the ideality and self-presence of intention and the uttered meaning. Put differently, the idea of iterability requires a minimal remainder and a minimum of idealisation; otherwise the identity of the self-same would not be repeatable and identifiable in the different occurrences of a mark. Iteration thus always entails *both* identity *and* difference.

However, iterability not only divides the identity of *individual* elements. Rather, this identity could neither determine nor delimit itself without differential relations to *other* elements. Because iterability is differential with respect to each individual element as well as between elements, the remainder cannot be that of a *full presence*. As a consequence, iterability "leaves us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say), to say something other than what we say *and* would have wanted to say, to understand something other than … etc".[207]

Yet as Derrida emphatically points out, this is not to say that the idea of intentionality is done away with altogether.[208] Rather, the remainder is a differential structure that overcomes the opposition of presence and absence. As he puts it: "… I never proposed "a kind of 'all or nothing' choice between pure realization of self-presence and complete freeplay or undecidability"".[209] Accordingly, Derrida also rejects the

[203] J. Derrida, *Signature Event Context*, 14.
[204] J. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 60f.
[205] Ibid., 61.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., 62.
[208] J. Derrida, *Signature Event Context*, 18.
[209] J. Derrida, *Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion*, 115. "The relation of "mis" (mis-understanding, mis-interpreting, for example) to that which is not "mis-," is not at all that of a general law to cases, but that of a *general possibility inscribed in* the structure of positivity, of normality, of the "standard." All that I recall is that this *structural possibility* must be taken into account when de-

accusation that his philosophy implies relativism, scepticism and nihilism. In actual fact, one of the aims of deconstruction is simply to pay utmost attention to *context* and the inexhaustible possibilities of re-contextualisation. Also, the oft-cited phrase *il n'y a pas de hors-text* can be construed as *there is nothing outside context*, and need not be read as a statement which affirms the notion of total freeplay and undecidability. However, what has to be done away with is the idea of *neutrality*. Precisely because the context is so decisive as regards the constitution of meaning, even the notion of 'scientific objectivity and truth' is only intelligible against the background of a vast, extremely complex and traditional, but nonetheless *conventional* context. Derrida even goes so far as to say that the entire "real-history-of-the-world" [210] can be called a context, which clearly indicates that his understanding of text and context does *not* exclude the world, reality and history.[211]

b) Beyond Derrida

Due to this relative stability of the context, the polysemy of individual utterances is limited – otherwise understanding and meaningful behaviour would not be possible.[212] However, despite occasional remarks to the contrary, Derrida's view is to a certain extent *parasitic* upon the idea of full-presence in the sense that he commits the *opposite* mistake. He rightly rejects the notion of communication as an imposition of self-identically conceived meanings on the addressee. It is not possible "… to make the other *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I produced it" (*VPh*, 89). Such a view of communication implies the problematic idea of a transcendental subject according to which subjectivity is conceived of in terms of an atemporal unity of thinking. "It contains the thought that others be 'only empirical' subjects *of the same* thinking. It is the thought of the translatability in principle from the thinking of one 'empirical subject' into the thinking of another 'empirical subject'. Language is thus understood as a merely 'external' designation 'of the same' thoughts".[213] Equally problematic is the belief in the possibility of an external, uninvolved observer who is capable of *checking* whether the meaning intended by the sender has been successfully, i.e. self-identically conveyed to the addressee.

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that at times the addressee does understand that which the sender says. Under certain circumstances at least, the concatenation of signifiers does come to an end since the addressee has understood the sign produced by the sender sufficiently and therefore *performs an action*. This action is itself a sign, an answer-sign, which is open to further interpretation. As indicated above, even an order must be considered a *question* to which the addressee can *respond* obediently or disobediently. Unless the order is taken to be a question, and the ad-

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scribing so-called ideal normality, or so-called just comprehension or interpretation, and that this possibility can be neither *excluded nor opposed*", ibid., 157, fn. 9.

[210] Ibid., 136. Quotation marks in the original text.

[211] Ibid., 137.

[212] Cf. P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, 40-65.

[213] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, 105.

dressee's reaction to it an answer, the relationship between order and reaction is thought of in terms of causality. The order is reduced to a cause and the reaction to an effect.[214]

The reason why Derrida's position is parasitic upon the metaphysical approach to meaning is that he disregards the phenomenologically observable occurrence of 'understanding' between interlocutors which is manifest in the addressee's production of answer- or action-signs. On the one hand, human beings *do* act, something that can hardly be denied, on the other hand they *have to* act for human life to be possible. Derrida however, when asked whether it is not obvious that communication really *is* successful at times, answers with an ambiguous "[p]erhaps".[215] It is here that deconstruction and Peircian Pragmaticism part ways. For Simon, the chain of interpretants needs to come to an end since human beings always operate under *finite* conditions. As outlined in the first part of this essay, the question about the meaning of a sign can be raised with respect to every sign. Thus the concatenation of interpretation could *in principle* be continued ad infinitum so that reference to reality would lie *in infinity*. In real life, however, this is not possible and we have to confine ourselves to a limited series of interpretation. If the sign is sufficiently understandable with respect to possible actions, or if there is simply no time left for further deliberation and reflection, true reference to reality is achieved. Hence reference must be understood *pragmatically*.[216]

In Simon's philosophy of the sign, the termination of the concatenation of signifiers, that is the transition from 'mere' interpretation to action, is consistently conceived of from the *internal* perspective of the interpreter/agent. According to him, it is always an *individual subject* that comprehends – or is in need of further clarification.[217] Nonetheless, it is very well possible that a second person intervenes and points out that the interpreter/agent has in actual fact *not* understood, although he believes to have done so. However, such an intervention is only plausible if the second person has *specific reasons* to express this doubt. And this presupposes that the latter is somehow involved in the subject's context and acts of interpretation. What is *not* possible, however, without relapsing into a quasi-metaphysical position, is *to question the possibility of understanding in the abstract*. But this is precisely what Derrida seems to do.

Once again, the question about the meaning of a sign can only be legitimately raised if there is a *particular* interpreter, in a *particular* context who does not understand a *particular* sign. "The only thing about which one can ever seriously ask is the

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[214] Ibid., 99.
[215] J. Derrida, *Signature Event Context*, 17. Quotation marks in original. However, it is important to keep in mind that the above quotation is taken from a text in which Derrida explores whether it is plausible to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful *performatives*, as Austin contends. Derrida raises the following rhetorical question: "You cannot deny that there are also performatives that succeed, and one has to account for them: meetings are called to order […] people say: "I pose a question"; they bet, challenge, christen ships, and sometimes even marry. It would seem that such events have occurred. And even if only one had taken place only once, we would still be obliged to account for it. I'll answer: "Perhaps"", ibid.
[216] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, 60f.
[217] J. Simon, *Zeichenphilosophie und Transzendentalphilosophie*, 83.

meaning of the sign that one does not understand right now, in the context that *is there* […] and the answer can only be another sign".[218] Derrida, by contrast, raises the question about the meaning of signs from an external, uninvolved and context-less perspective, without there really being a question of what these signs mean. From the perspective of Pragmaticism, deconstruction is therefore as 'metaphysical' as the metaphysics of presence Derrida so vehemently criticises, since it equally implies the possibility of an external perspective on the sign and its referent, i.e. that which the sign represents. On a metaphysical view, there is a one-to-one correlation between the sign and what it stands for, in the case of deconstruction, presence is replaced by *absence*. That is to say, it is believed that, due to the infinite deferral of meaning, reference is excluded. According to Simon, however, a sign *refers to reality* if it is *immediately* understood. The chain of signs *has* to come to an end since human beings are finite and because we cannot live without acting. Here too, Derrida's deconstruction fails to do justice to the 'human condition'. "'Postmodern' positions evade 'theoretically' the seriousness of having to act or of having to refrain from acting that is required *at all times*, and, to this extent, persist in the position of metaphysics".[219] In other words, deconstruction in principle retains the ideal of full-presence aimed at by the metaphysician, but then adds that this goal can never be achieved. As a result, the agent always lacks a reasonable foundation for his actions since the meaning of signs is infinitely deferred.

c) Terminating the chain of signifiers

Dialogue

In his reflections upon the termination of the concatenation of signs, Simon does not primarily focus on communication. In principle, every material or non-material entity in the world can provoke a thought process in which we ask about the meaning of a sign we do not understand fully, thus distinguishing between the sign and its meaning. Yet communication – which stands at the centre of this essay – raises specific questions, in addition, but not in contradiction to the framework provided by Simon. I shall argue that, so far as *communication* is concerned, the chain of interpretation comes *prototypically* to an end in a situation of *dialogue*, rather than *monologue*. But why and in what sense is dialogue preferable to monologue?

In part II of this essay, communication is understood according to the model *s* interprets (or sets) *x* as *y* to *a* in the context *c*. Now the addressee's reception of the sender's message, which interprets *x* as *y* to him, is itself an act of interpretation, i.e. it must be thought of as an *active appropriation*. This is not to say that the addressee's creative reception of *x* as *y* is necessarily *opposed* to the preceding interpretation – although counter-interpretations can of course occur at any time; it is rather the addressee's *personal appropriation* of the sent message. On the other hand, the addressee's creative reception is *related to* and *dependent on* the preceding interpretation of *x* as *y* and not just something arbitrarily new that is in no way connected to

[218] J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, 49.
[219] Ibid., 61.

the initial address. This at least is the way we should understand the occurring 'innovation' if the focus is on the 'synchronic' aspect of appropriation.[220]

Now even if the addressee has an experience of evidence, i.e. if he immediately grasps the meaning of the sender's statement, he may nonetheless give a 'report' of his way of appropriating the sender's interpretation. That is, the addressee will himself produce signs which can then again be assessed by the sender and so on. In other words, the addressee often sets up a hypothesis about what the sender could have meant, which he then has to revise and refine in the course of the ensuing conversation. Perhaps the first response of the addressee to the sender suffices because it seems a satisfactory answer to the latter – so that there is no need for a further dialogue – or the exchange ends in a drift that can only be arbitrarily interrupted under the pressure of time. Such a deadlock can easily occur if the interlocutors have a fundamentally different background-knowledge (on the level of interpretation$_1$), often without being aware of it.

If the chain of signs does come to an end, however, then only because both the sender and the addressee agree that the latter has understood correctly. This does not imply the view that they come to understand it in the *same* way – if 'the same' is understood in the metaphysical sense. That is to say, there is no such thing as a self-identical intention of the sender which can be 'preserved' by being successfully conveyed to the addressee. It is only that no other or further criteria than mutual agreement about the addressee's understanding of the sender's statement are required or conceivable to end the dialogue between them. Reference to reality must be understood pragmatically and coincides with the termination of the chain of signifiers.

To be sure, even in dialogue the transition from (mere) interpretation to action is still based on a 'subjective' experience of evidence. However, in dialogue this experience is inter-subjectively controlled, which of course presupposes that there is a common practice and horizon of interpretation (in the sense of Abel's interpretation$_{1+2}$) which both the sender and the addressee are part of.

It goes without saying that there are many situations of *monologic address*, where communication is successful and without a high risk of misunderstanding – independent of whether the sender speaks to one or a large number of addressees. To give a famous example, under certain circumstances, the mere utterance of the word 'hammer' may be enough to successfully communicate the meaning: 'please give me the hammer now'. Likewise, the command of an officer to his soldiers may lead to immediate action, without the slightest misunderstanding. In both cases Eco's *redundancy rules* apply, even if, as Simon stresses, obedience to an order is also an act of 'free' interpretation. It is only that these two examples do not fall into the same category of communication as Church services.

The 'Sitz im Leben' of the termination

The fact that the chain of interpretants comes prototypically to an end in a situation of dialogue, has consequences for the question of the *Sitz im Leben* of this termina-

[220] As opposed to diachronic innovation.

tion. Evidently, the paradigm of communication which governs the Church service is not dialogical – or at least not dialogical in the sense that it leads to immediate action.[221] For this reason, it does not constitute the locus where the concatenation of signs is terminated. And it is not the aim of this essay to advocate that Church services should become 'more dialogical' as some theologians suggest – at least not in the way discussed above. Rather, its primary task is that of *formation*, i.e. it introduces the addressee into the Christian perspective on the world and thus enables him or her to acquire specifically Christian interpretative skills. The acquisition of theses skills is based on and mediated by communication as well – but requires a very *different form* of communication. Within the context of the Church service, the focus is on the *internalisation of the Gospel narrative* which constitutes the very basis of *all* Christian decision-making, be it personal or rather institutional and political. Accordingly, what takes centre stage is the non-dualistically conceived transition from a non-Christian perspective (sin) to a Christian perspective on the world (sanctification) on the most basic level, without the acquisition of specific, subject-related interpretative skills, which lead to expert knowledges. As will be further spelled out in part III, in this type of communication polysemy plays an important part and remains 'unreduced' without threatening the successful conveyance of the messages.

But let me return to the subject of this second part: communication which terminates the chain of interpretants leading to immediate action. This termination does not (in the first place) occur in the Church service but rather in the *wide variety of different situations in everyday life*. For this reason it is advisable to distinguish between different *fields* of authority, and different *types* of competence. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the dialogical structure of this type of communication is not restricted to the interpersonal level, but is a general characteristic of processes of decision-making.

B) Fields of authority

a) Competence and authority

According to Bochenski, competence is a dyadic and authority a triadic relation. He introduces the following terminology:[222]

– *s* is the *bearer* of authority (sender)
– *a* is the *subject* of authority (addressee)
– *f* is the *field* of authority of which *x* is an element

It is important to notice that *s* and *a* may be institutions, committees, or political bodies and need not be individual human beings. The dyadic relation of competence and the triadic relation of authority can be defined as follows:

– *s* is *competent* in the field *f* if *s* has sufficient knowledge in *f*

[221] A different kind of active reception will be discussed in part three of this essay.
[222] Cf. J.M. Bochenski, *The Logic of Religion*, 162-169; cf. J. Tarkki, *Questioning Religious Authority*, 10-122. I have adjusted the variables to the formula used in this essay.

– *s* is an *authority* for *a* in the field *f*, if *a* accepts in principle every statement of the kind *x* is *y*, made by *s*, provided *x* lies within the field *f*

However, these definitions should not be taken for granted. First, it is questionable whether competence is really a dyadic relation. For one might argue that *s* is only competent in the field *f* with respect to highly specific questions and problems. Nonetheless, the above definition is certainly acceptable insofar as this aspect may already be covered by the variable *f*. For instance, in everyday language we might say that s_1 and s_2 both *know Britain very well*. Suppose s_1 is a historian who knows all the important historical sights in Britain but is ignorant about public footpaths and breeding grounds for wild gees. S_2 by contrast, is a passionate rambler who cares more about nature than culture and therefore does not even need a map to walk from York to Cambridge, but is utterly uninformed about castles and battlefields. According to the above definition, their competence lies in *different* fields. Secondly, *a* is supposed to accept every statement of the kind *x* is *y* if *x* lies in the field *f*. Yet it seems advisable to add further criteria (some of which are in principle covered in the above formula by the context *c*) such as:

– *a* has *reasons* to believe that *s* really *is* an authority in the field *f*. In other words, *a's* blind trust and submissiveness does not render *s* an authority. Since human authority is always context- and community-dependent, this criterion can only be fulfilled if *a* relies on the judgement of the community (or certain members of that community) which pursue(s) the same goal or good as himself. This is also implied as regards institutional authorities. The addressee who listens to the sender's advise presupposes that the latter was (legally and) justifiably appointed to the position he holds and presumes that he or he really is an authority in the field *f*. This dependence on other people is inevitable, for as a non-expert, *a* lacks the necessary experience and expertise to assess *s's* competence in the field *f*.

– there is not another person present (s_2) with greater competence in the field *f* whose views weigh more than that of the first person *s*. Here too, the non-expert is utterly dependent on other people's judgment, for he cannot know himself whether *s* or s_2 is more competent, and accordingly, more trustworthy. Strictly speaking, however, the non-expert is of course never totally ignorant and therefore always actively involved in evaluation and judgement. This will be taken into account in the next paragraph.

– *a* himself does not come up with an alternative interpretation '*x* is *z* rather than *y*', which is accepted by *s* and/or the community (that pursues the same goal or good represented by the field *f* and which recognised hitherto the competence and authority of *s*) *as the better and more convincing interpretation of x*. This is a common situation in living traditions that is nonetheless not always easy to cope with. First, it presupposes that what I have called loosely 'the community', really embodies the necessary skills to make an informed judgment on which of the two interpretations is preferable with respect to the goals or goods that the community aims at. Secondly, this situation constitutes a challenge for *s*. For *s's* behaviour will inevitably reveal what matters more to him: his own prestige or the good pursued by the com-

munity which he is part of. He either admits that the interpretation of *x* as *z* is a real progress regarding the good his community is striving for (insofar as he really *is* convinced about the superiority of the interpretation of *x* as *z*), or narcissistically yields to self-glorification and insists on the correctness of his own interpretation (*x* is *y*). Of course, a single incidence of this kind will not undermine *s's* authority. However, it should be the aim of every devoted teacher to raise his pupils to a higher level of expertise than he himself represents. Only thus is ensured that the tradition and its quest for truth takes centre stage and not the corrupt human craving for self-deification. The community of (theological) researchers thus not only has to uphold high intellectual standards but must also exhibit the virtue of *humility*.

b) Synchronic contingency

Sender

On the one hand, *s* can interpret *x* in the *same* context *c* as y_1 to a_1 and as y_2 to a_2 without there being a problem regarding the identity of the object *x*, i.e. without succumbing to post-modern relativism. That is to say, such a situation may occur even if *s*, a_1 and a_2 inhabit the *same* interpretative perspective and horizon and *s* does not change his interpretative perspective between the two acts of interpretation. In other words, the distinction between the context *c* (which does not change) and the addressees a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4 *etc.*, takes into account the different background knowledges of the addressees. This is not to say that this level of differences is always the most important one, for that would amount to embracing a problematic philosophy of the subject. Yet, depending on the issue at stake, this dimension of interpretation nonetheless has to be paid attention to. For instance, a teacher explains a particular phenomenon to two students with a similar cultural background and a similar worldview, who acquired different degrees of competence in the course of their studies. For this reason, the teacher also has to provide two different interpretations to explain one and the same phenomenon to a_1 and a_2 respectively. As we have seen, this level of interpretation corresponds to Abel's interpretation$_3$.

Addressees

Furthermore, since a_1 and a_2 are *actively* involved in the reception of *s's* address (cf. Peirce's interpretant), they will surely interpret this address in different ways even if *s* interprets *x* as *y* to *both of them.* That is to say, a_1 will interpret *y* – i.e. *s's* interpretation of *x* presented to both a_1 and a_2 – as y_1 and a_2 as y_2. In other words, there might be differences despite an 'identical' context, an 'identical' speech-act, and an 'identical' interpretative perspective (interpretation$_1$). This is the situation of a public talk, a lecture or Church proclamation, where various addressees are exposed to *one* speech-act. A more comprehensive analysis of the addressee's active involvement in the reception of a message was carried out in part II, 3, B.

Context

On the other hand, a change of the context *c* may affect *s's* interpretation of *x*, even if *x*, *a* and *s's* interpretative perspective (interpretation$_1$) do not change. Whereas before, *s* interpreted *x* as *y* to *a* in the context *c*, *s* will now interpret *x* as y_2 to *a* in the context c_2. For instance, a professor of theology who moves from Britain to the United States, taking some of his students with him, will explain to them the nature of secularism in a different way than in his home country. Even if both, the old and the new analysis are *Christian* interpretations of this phenomenon. This roughly corresponds to Abel's interpretation$_2$.

c) Innovation

The notion of innovation leads back to what was discussed in a) under the heading 'competence and authority'. Innovation inevitably entails a certain risk, for an unconventional interpretative move may lead to a clash with the prevailing interpretative practice: "The stronger the 'move', the more likely it is to be denied the minimum consensus, precisely because it changes the rules of the game upon which consensus had been based".[223]

This leads to a further issue that will be discussed at greater length in part III: every genuinely new interpretation of *x* as *y* may concomitantly change the *context* within which the act of interpretation was carried out. The degree, to which such a transformation of the context is possible, varies with the *type* of interpretation that is performed. Some interpretative acts are specifically designed to alter not just the 'immediate' context of the utterance, but the *semiotic system of a culture* (what Lyotard calls the rules of the language game[224]). In principle, this type of interpretation can still be conceived of according to the formula, *s interprets (or sets) x as y to a in the context c*. However, as will be seen in part III, it differs in many respects from the 'literal understanding' of speech outlined above.

d) Synchronic and diachronic competence

In order to interpret *x* as *y* to *a* in the context *c*, *s* needs specific skills. First, as the *interpretandum x* always already comes in the form of an *interpreted x* (i.e. *x* as *p*, *q*, *r*, etc.) *s* has to know all the *relevant* interpretations of *x* on the diachronic (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and synchronic level (*culture studies*). This is at least required as regards very complex acts of interpretation, such as performed by academics. In other words, *s* needs certain *knowledge* about *x*. *S* then has to critically relate these various interpretations to each other and evaluate them in a complex process according to the criteria embodied in the practice of interpretation which he is part of. Secondly, *s* needs to be informed about the context *c* and the addresses *a* in order to perform his act of interpretation successfully.

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[223] J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 63.

[224] I am not suggesting that the terms 'language game' (as understood by Lyotard) and 'semiotic system' are interchangeable. But they are both hermeneutical categories whose rules or structure can be altered and modified.

e) Interpretative perspective

The interpretation of *x* as *y* is not just determined by the context *c* and the addressee *a*, but most fundamentally by the interpretative perspective that *s* 'inhabits'. Hypothetically, at least, we can say that even if *s*, *x*, *a* and *c* remained the same, but *s* inhabited a different interpretative perspective, *s* would interpret *x* as *z* and not as *y*. Needless to say that such an experiment could not be carried out in real life.

Furthermore, it is important to notice in what way Peirce's triadic understanding of the sign is used in this essay. Peircian categories have been employed in various ways in theology: for a hermeneutics of Scripture[225], the sacraments[226], liturgiology[227] and so forth. In this investigation however, at least so far as 'concrete acts of interpretation' are concerned, it is not Scripture or the liturgical sign that is taken as the 'dynamical object', but objects in the world, be they of a sensible or intelligible nature. Given that it is primarily the Christian narratives that shape the 'topography' of the Christian perspective on the world, one could say that Scripture comes into play in the *as-structure* of the interpretative act (provided one abstracts from the variability of all the other factors). Naturally, there is an immensely complex process of interpretation mediating between the biblical text and statements of the kind '*x* is *y*'. It is never simply an individual that establishes a link between the Christian narratives and a particular *x*. Rather, already on the most basic level of scriptural interpretation, *s* is part of an interpretative practice, i.e. part of a *tradition*.

C) The attunement of the interpreter

Apart from the shift from monologue to dialogue and the division into different fields of authority and competence, there is a third aspect of authority which should not be overlooked: that of the *attunement* of the interpreter. This last point is closely related to the *dynamical* character of Christian faith which is neglected in Barth's *Prolegomena*. In actual fact, the notion that every finite object possesses an inexhaustible semantic depth belongs to the very essence of Christian faith. The eschatological fulfilment of creation is not to be thought of as the arrival of a definitive and rigid univocity, but as a dynamical process in the sense of an ever deeper understanding of God, world and self. Knowledge of God, knowledge of the world, and knowledge of the self form an indissoluble whole. To the same extent that God remains hidden, the world remains hidden, and I remain hidden to myself. Revelation and creation – which cannot be separated – are so rich *ut nunquam reapse exhauriatur*.

Drawing on a Neoplatonic thought-model, Patristic theology distinguishes between *purification*, *illumination* and *perfection*. In spite of the aforementioned interrelationship regarding knowledge of self, world and God, in the first phase the emphasis is on the purification of the individual believer (self), in the second on the perception the divine *logoi* of creation (world) and in the third on deification (God).[228] It is worth noticing that the third step does not entail a distantiation from

[225] P. Ochs, *Peirce, pragmatism and the logic of scripture.*
[226] M. Vetter, *Zeichen deuten auf Gott*.
[227] G. Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*.
[228] D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 77ff, 195ff, 303ff.

creation, but rather constitutes its ultimate fulfilment and completion through the mediatory work of man.

The illumined believer reaches the state of *natural contemplation* (φυσικὴ θεωρία), which enables him to partly recognise the 'essential principles' in creation. By participating in the incarnate Christ, man realises his capacity to perceive divine presence in the sensible as well as intelligible aspects of the world and comes to see God as origin (ἀρχὴ), middle (μεσότης) (i.e. as sustainer) and transcendent end (τέλος) of all beings. According to St Maximus, it is only through ascetic struggle, man's active response to God's kenotic self-emptying in Jesus Christ, that true judgment about reality can be achieved.[229] That is to say, natural contemplation is only possible in and through the incarnate Christ. Deploying Chalcedonian terminology, St Maximus explains that the one *Logos*, the second person of the Trinity, re-establishes the union among the nature of things without confusing them.[230] Yet man is actively involved in this process:[231]

> What man does in his mediating activity is that he grasps and perceives the created world in all its orders through his senses as well as through his mind […] and holds it together in its pure relationship to the Logos Creator in virtue of his pure mind and his purified sense, which excludes any misuse of the created things. Thus he is free to perform his mediation as *a liturgical function in the world before God who has created it out of nothing …*

Within the framework of a philosophy of interpretation, the patristic understanding of human beings as *microcosmoi* and *mediators* can be deepened by intepreting man as *homo interpretans*. As is evident, the *logoi* are not conceived by Maximus as self-evident facts, which can be detected by the uninvolved observer. St Maximus' is not a 'natural theology' in the sense of Enlightenment theism, and his cosmology does not serve the purpose of demonstrating the existence of God by 'reason alone'.[232] Natural contemplation is necessarily preceded by *praxis* (πρᾶξις), a process in which the Christian cooperates with divine grace and acquires virtues, must notably love (ἀγάπη), which re-enables him to perceive God's presence in the world (γνῶσις).[233] Thus St Maximus' ontological and ethico-spiritual terminology can be translated into hermeneutic idiom. The recognition of the *logoi* in creation is mediated by Church practice into which the believer is initiated, i.e. it is philosophically speaking, first, a specific *interpretation* of the world, and second, based on interpretative skills that must be *acquired*. Natural contemplation is "the result of a long term exercise of reason guided by faith and sustained by striving in a virtuous life".[234] What is required is a continuous "effort to direct our lives, and to explain things in the world, in the light of faith".[235] Consequently, without this process of purification and the appropriation of divine grace, creation remains opaque.

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[229] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 10 (MPG 91, 1108A).
[230] Ibid., 7 (MPG 91, 1077C-1080A).
[231] L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 403.
[232] This is not to say that Christian antiquity did not develop a natural theology. See J. Pelican, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 184-199.
[233] Maximus Confessor, *Capita de caritate*, I, 86f, 95-99 (MPG 90, 961A-B, 980C-D, 981C-D).
[234] D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 217.
[235] Ibid., 214.

On the *synchronic* level, the incarnate *Logos* recapitulates the many *logoi* of creation in himself (cf. Eph 1:10). But this unification is not a conflation of disparate perspectives on the world leading to the one universal *Logos*: Jesus Christ. The unity which is aimed at can only be realised through a *particular* (ecclesiastical) practice and is not to be understood as a speculative theory about the nature of the world. Furthermore, Maximus does not teach a total discontinuity between old and new creation. Thus it is the right interpretation of *x* as *y* – or the right *use* (χρῆσις) of intelligible and material natures, as Maximus puts it[236] – which renders the world transparent as God's good creation. Moreover, the recognition of the one *Logos* in the many *logoi* is not achieved by moving from the particular to the universal, or from the concrete to the abstract. Each created thing "is unmistakably unique in itself and its identity remains distinct (ἀσύγχυτος) in relation to other things".[237]

According to St Maximus, the recognition of the *logoi* in creation occurs in the blinking of an eye. The Christian, who has spiritually matured, immediately refers everything to God or sees everything in the light of divine presence. There are two interrelated reasons why this gift of discernment (διάκρισις) can neither be interpreted in terms of a phenomenological intuition (*Wesensschau*), nor as the (merely passive) reception of a divine speech-act.[238]

a) The believer's experience of evidence is only reliable because it occurs within a particular interpretative community into which he has been initiated and whose practice of interpretation he shares. Abel explains the occurrence of such experiences on the basis of the interplay between interpretation$_3$ and interpretation$_{1+2}$ and with reference to Wittgenstein's distinction between *saying* and *showing*.[239] If something 'shows itself', we do not understand it without the mediation of signs, but rather a sign without the help of *other* signs. "The evidence is insurpassably high, and the showing of the signs is *directly*, i.e. *without* further epistemic mediators comprehended".[240] Instances of 'showing' can only occur if there is a well-functioning practice of interpretation so that the complex interplay between different levels of interpretation remains concealed. As Simon puts it, from the perspective of the addressee, something is perceived *without interpretation*. Thus, from a philosophical perspective, Maximus' approach clearly transcends the distinctions between realism and idealism, intuitionism and rationalism. However, there might be an important difference between the above outline of 'showing' and the contemplation of the *logoi* in Maximus, insofar as the latter is not in the first place a single event, or a series of events, but the perception of a 'sparkling'. That is to say, from the viewpoint of the purified Christian, the beings in the world are *continuously* suffused with divine meanings.

b) As already indicated, the state of natural contemplation requires a long effort of spiritual preparation, resulting in the acquisition of virtues. It thus does not suffice

[236] Maximus Confessor, *Capita de caritate*, II, 17, 73, 78, 82; III, 3, 4, 86 (MPG 90, 989A-B, 1008A-B, 1009A, 1017C-D, 1044B).
[237] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum 7* (MPG 91, 1077C).
[238] Cf. D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 217.
[239] G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 169-208.
[240] Ibid., 176.

just to emphasis that the interpreter is part of an interpretative practice, it is also imperative to distinguish between *different degrees of familiarity* with this practice. The degree, to which somebody is able to judge things and actions correctly, depends on the degree of his spiritual maturity. Thus the lightning intuition of the *logoi*, is only free of subjectivism if it results from a previous purification of our nature, which requires a long-term struggle. Furthermore, lightning-like contemplation does not *replace* discursive reasoning, since Maximus does not know a nature-grace distinction in the way developed by Barth. Grace does not effect knowledge of the *logoi* in creation by itself, but uses the 'natural' powers of man which are always already directed to the knowledge of the divine:[241]

> Neither does divine grace produce the illuminations of knowledge if someone is not in the state to receive the illumination by his natural faculty, nor does this capacity of his produce the illumination of knowledge, without the grace that grants it.

Maximus' is therefore a *middle-voiced* understanding of the reception of divine grace (see part III, 1, B, e). There is no distinction between nature and grace insofar as the development of certain predispositions to perceive the *logoi* by grace is itself brought about by grace.[242]

Due to the two points mentioned above, the danger of subjectivism, which looms large in Barth's theology, can be drastically reduced. For in Maximus, the reliability of any experience of evidence can be inter-subjectively controlled. An interpretation of *x* as *y* performed by a sender *s* is only credible if the addressee has *reasons* to believe that *s* is a *reliable* sender (see II, 4, B, a). And these reasons can only be provided by the community to which he and the sender belong. It is the community's collective memory which determines whether it is likely or not that this particular sender is going to perform an act of interpretation which does justice to the good the community pursues.

Furthermore, this kind of discernment is highly context- and addressee-sensitive. John Climacus, for instance, pondering on how a monk can recognise whether a particular human endeavour corresponds to God's will or not, points out that the experience of great troubles and distractions, *as well as* unexpected success, can be a sign of divine approval.[243] Naturally it follows from this that both, troubles and success, can also mean the opposite, namely God's *dis*approval. Consequently, only the person who was bestowed upon the gift of discernment is able to decide whether a particular undertaking falls into the first or the latter category.

Moreover, the gift of discernment enables the believer to terminate the concatenation of signs under the pressure of time – "things requiring immediate action" – as well as to successfully bring to an end a prolonged period of decision-making – "things […] that take time".[244] This adds further evidence to the aforementioned observation that the tradition did not think of grace as something *extrinsic* to human nature. In Barth, however, divine presence cannot really enter the spatio-temporal

[241] Maximus Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59 (MPG 90, 617B).
[242] Ibid., 63 (MPG 90, 672B-D-676A-C).
[243] Johannes Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, step 26 (MPG 88, 1057D-1060A).
[244] Ibid., 1060A; cf. part I, 1, F.

realm. Divine intervention (on the level of the tertiary sacrament), takes on the form of *punctual events*, which can be recognised by the believer in terms of fleeting *experiences of evidence*. In John Climacus, by contrast, a long period of decision-making can be accompanied by grace, in which divine presence uses the 'natural' faculties of man.

The gift of discernment is also to a very high degree *addressee*-sensitive. As outlined above, there is the case that *s* speaks to a_1 and a_2, in the 'same' context, from the 'same' interpretative perspective, about the 'same' *x* (though not exactly at the same time, of course), but nonetheless interprets *x* as y_1 to a_1 and as y_2 to a_2. Thus it is the difference regarding the personal background knowledges, the private codes of a_1 and a_2 that accounts for these divergent interpretations. Yet such a practice may cause puzzlement in everyday life.[245]

It follows from all this that besides the shift from monologue to dialogue, the *attunement* of a person is a further criterion that must be taken into account for a theological understanding of authority.

There is a twofold relationship between the attunement of the interpreter and the *diachronic* dimension of the *logoi*. For these divine principles are not only united and held together by the one *Logos*, without confusion, they also fulfil a *dynamical* and *teleological* function. Drawing on an expression coined by Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus calls the *logoi* 'divine wills' or 'divine intentions' (*θεῖα θελήματα*).[246] As regards protology, these terms are significant as they mark off the Christian understanding of creation out of God's good will from the neo-Platonic notion of emanation.[247] Whereas this first aspect concerns the divine act of bringing creatures into being (*τὸ εἶναι*), the 'divine wills' also determine the *development* of creatures in the sense of a *permanent movement towards God*. This state of well-being (*ἀεὶ εἶναι*) requires the free co-operation of human beings.[248]

On the one hand, the attuned person lives in accordance with his *logos*, i.e. he realises his potential as God's 'image' through a dynamical process and turns it into 'likeness'. On the other hand, the attuned person is restored to fulfil his mediatory function in the world and assists *other* creatures in adopting a mode of life that corresponds to their *logos*. Natural contemplation according to Maximus is not a *visio* of eternal forms but something dynamical, an active co-operation with divine providence. Although Maximus, as a $6^{th}/7^{th}$ century theologian and philosopher, does of course not have the historical awareness of modern thinkers, the contingent character of human existence is nonetheless taken into account in his thought insofar as the

[245] "Hearing the confessions of two women who came one after the other to speak of an incident in which they had both been involved, he [i.e. Father Anthony] concentrated on the needs and motives of each of them and came out with two entirely different sets of comments …", G. Crow, *'This Holy Many'*, 197. After the end of confession, however, the women unwisely told each other what advise they had got "and burst out with indignation: 'Father Anthony! We've both come to you about the same matter and you've said different things to us. Don't you know what you meant to say?", ibid.
[246] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7 (MPG 91, 1085A); Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, V, 8 (MPG 3, 824C).
[247] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7 (MPG 91, 1077C).
[248] Ibid., 10 (MPG 91, 1116B).

divine *logoi* (also) structure individual beings.[249] And because individual beings always exist in a particular context and under certain historical circumstances, realisation of their specific *logoi* cannot be achieved by following an eternal and immutable principle. But this is not to say, of course, that there are no trans-subjective rules whatsoever, which govern this process. Rather, in order to avoid both ossification and subjectivism, continuity and discontinuity must be kept in a balance. In any case, as innumerable examples from the Christian tradition illustrate, the gift of discernment is the skill to recognise the living divine will at a particular time and in a particular context, i.e. under the contingent conditions of everyday life. And it is not at all the case, as one might think, that the scope of this type of knowledge is limited to the inter-personal and pastoral. Quite the reverse: The history of Christianity is littered with stories and reports about exceptional Christian personalities who made wise political judgements[250] or even had (specifically Christian) physical or physiological insights.[251]

The limit of this kind of knowledge is not its scope, but the fact that it is only concerned with the *particular* and *individual*. The gift of discernment may enable a person to recognise what is to be done at a particular time, but it is difficult to see how it could lead e.g. to the development of a *theory* that seeks to make statements about reality on a more general level.[252] However, a consistently icarnational theology cannot neglect this aspect of human life. Thus in the following chapter, the relationship between the one *Logos* and the many *logoi* will still be the main focus. Yet, recalling the aforementioned 'fields of authority' and the notion of 'expert knowledge', I shall reflect on how the relationship between the one *Logos* and various human *disciplines* or *domains* is to be thought of.

D) The one authority and the many authorities

a) The Radical Orthodoxy Project

If Christian theology aims at a comprehensive (re-)interpretation of reality, it cannot build upon a notion of 'wisdom' that is exclusively concerned with the knowledge of the individual and particular. Rather, in order to be effective and relevant, it has somehow to *categorise* reality according to non-arbitrary criteria, which are themselves derived from the Christian *Logos*. Yet this is not to say that there is only *one* legitimate way of categorising. As with the (re)interpretation of particular entities, here too, a high degree of context-sensitivity is required.

In the Middle Ages, the three transcendentals, the good, the beautiful and the true coincided or were at least interdependent. What is good is also true and beautiful.[253] In Kant's three Critiques, by contrast, the transcendentals form three discrete fields of enquiry. Right action, which presupposes the freedom of the intelligible realm, is

[249] "By his Word an by his Wisdom he made all things and is making all things, universal as well as particulars, at the proper time", ibid., 7 (MPG 91, 1080A).
[250] Cf. N. Zernov, *The Russians and their Church*, 38-43.
[251] Elder Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love*, 176f.
[252] This is not to say that the more *general* level of the (scientific) theory is no longer perspectival.
[253] Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 360ff.

independent of cognition as analysed in the first Critique. Likewise, judgments of taste, i.e. aesthetic judgments, are neither of cognitive nor of ethical value but are merely subjective. In the history of ideas since Kant, almost every aspect of human life has been elevated to the status of a first philosophy from which all other aspects of human reality can be derived: economics (Marx), subconscious desire (Freud), biology (Darwin), aesthetics (Adorno), ethics (Levinas), language (Wittgenstein), signs (Eco), etc.

Christian theology reacted in different ways to these challenges and often failed to articulate its specific message accurately and uncompromisingly. Yet it is appropriate to say that there is almost unanimous agreement among contemporary theologians that Christian theology is not to be identified with *any* of these aspects but is *related* to all of them. This at least is the impression one gets from the great interest in inter-disciplinary work in Anglo-Saxon theology. Some years ago, Radical Orthodoxy has characterised its own theological agenda as follows: compared with Barthian neo-Orthodoxy, it tries to be "… 'more mediating, but less accommodating' – since, while it assumes that theology must speak *also* of something else [than God], it seeks always to recognise a theological *difference* in such speaking".[254] Accordingly, the first collection of essays published in 1999 comprises contributions about knowledge, revelation, language, desire, friendship, erotics, aesthetics, perception, etc. Evidently, such an approach has far-reaching consequences for the question of authority.

If Radical Orthodoxy wants to be *more mediating but less accommodating* than Barthianism, this means, first, that the Christian *Logos* is not supposed to be *subordinated* to secular, non-theological thought, and secondly, that theology is not to be considered a discipline *confined to a limited realm* among other realms which are governed by non-theological *logoi*. As far as the first criterion is concerned, it was Barth's avowed aim not to accept any other starting point or foundation for his theology than God's Trinitarian self-revelation in Christ (*KD* I/1, 35-43).[255] However, as e.g. Adriaanse has shown, even if a direct influence of Husserl on Barth can be excluded, there are striking parallels between the notion of revelation in dialectical theology and Husserl's early phenomenology.[256] This does not constitute a problem as such but simply shows that both thinkers struggled with similar questions at the beginning of the twentieth century and resorted to similar thought-categories to answer them. Yet a *theological* assessment reveals a pneumatological deficiency in Barth's

[254] J. Milbank/G. Ward/C. Pickstock, *Suspending the Material*, 2. Cf. J. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 120.

[255] One has to keep in mind that Barth tried to distinguish between, first, the event of revelation itself, secondly, the statement or statements about this event (in the form of the biblical text) and statements about the Trinity of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is a "work of the *Church*" and thus an analysis of statements about revelation and the event of revelation. "The text of the doctrine of the Trinity is throughout related to the texts of the biblical witness to revelation, it includes also certain concepts taken from that text, but it does so just as an interpretation does, i.e. it *translates* and *expounds* that text, and that entails that it makes use of other concepts than those in the text before it. That means that it not only repeats what is there, but it confronts what is there with something new, to explain what is there", *KD* I/1, 325, cf. 327.

[256] H.J. Adriaanse, *Zu den Sachen selbst*, 1, 187-194.

theology which manifests itself semiotically as a disregard for the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimension of meaning. And it is due to this deficiency that Barth's theology fails to be culturally relevant and falls short of penetrating the symbol-system of a society by changing its codes. Thus, even if the first criterion – undoubtedly one of the main features of Barth's theology – is (in principle) met, his notion of God's self-revelation does not fulfil the second criterion, which ultimately renders the fulfilment of the first criterion at least incomplete. Milbank and his allies write: "by refusing all 'mediations' through other spheres of knowledge and culture, Barthianism tended to assume a positive autonomy for theology, which rendered philosophical concerns a matter of indifference. Yet this itself was to remain captive to a modern – even liberal – duality of reason and revelation, and ran the risk of allowing worldly knowledge an unquestioned validity within its own sphere".[257]

On Milbank's view, there are tendencies in Barth's work to understand theology as a science among other sciences, with its own specific and limited object. Thus theology is regarded a positive science which checks whether the Church's God-talk conforms to the being of the Church: *Jesus Christ* (*KD* I/1, 2f). "And, indeed, since the exegetical check on the Church's talk of God is in some sense measurable, theology, in the strict sense as reflexive science, is itself 'secular' (and so, presumably teachable in secular universities)".[258]

But the problem is not that Barth conceives theology in terms of a *general* science, thus subordinating it to non-theological, secular standards of rationality. To be sure, theology *is* a science among others insofar as it has, like them, an object, a methodology and a way of rendering its claims accountable. Yet this is a merely *formal* similarity. On the *material* level, no such correspondence occurs. In actual fact, Barth emphasises so much theology's radical *difference* from other disciplines, as regards its material aspects, that it becomes questionable to call it "science" at all.[259] And if it comes to a clash between the conventional, secular understanding of 'science' and the theological one, it is the *latter* which is normative.[260]

However, as already indicated, the problem why the first criterion is nonetheless only partly met lies in the fact that the boundary of the field of theological investigation is drawn too narrowly. Milbank thus rightly points out that in Barth, the 'object' of theology cannot call into question the methods and supposed 'objects' of other sciences and thus remains captive to liberal thought. In line with the approach taken in this essay, Milbank writes that because theology "is an all-inclusive (but not fully

[257] J. Milbank/G. Ward/C. Pickstock, *Suspending the Material*, 2. Milbank elaborates on this statement in *Knowledge*, 32-34, fn 1, where he quotes Barth: "Philosophie aber ist eine strenge und weitschichtige Wissenschaft für sich, und es steht dem Theologen nicht an, so zu tun, als befinde er sich in der Lage, gleichsam im Nebenamt auch noch eine Philosophie vorzutragen and ausgerechnet einem Kant etwas am Zeug flicken zu können", K. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, 274.

[258] J. Milbank, *Knowledge*, 33.

[259] "Der Ausrichtung auf […] ihre eigene Aufgabe hat sie vielmehr schlechterdings *jede* Rücksicht auf das, was sonst "Wissenschaft" heisst, unterzuordnen und nötigenfalls zu opfern […] Sie hat methodisch nichts bei ihnen zu lernen" (*KD* I/1, 6).

[260] "Die Theologie hat keinen Anlass, sich den Namen einer Wissenschaft verbieten zu lassen. Wer weiss denn, ob sie es nicht mehr ist als viele oder alle der unter jener Konvention vereinigten „Wissenschaften"? (*KD* I/1, 9).

graspable) perspective, not just one perspective among many, other disciplines, especially philosophy, would become theological when they were *utterly transfigured*, when the infinite transformed their sense of their finite objects and methods, and in ever unpredictable ways".[261]

1) Radical Orthodoxy's *reluctance to accommodate* to secular thought means that theology is answerable to the bishop and the Church rather than to academic standards embodied in secular universities – although it must face the "abyss of self-reflexivity" as well.[262] This can hardly be contested but at the same time oversimplifies the highly complex character of the genesis and formation of Milbank's own theology and of theology in general. As he himself points out, the Christian *Logos* is never simply 'given' and then, in a second step, 'applied' to the questions of a particular time but only 'appears' in the act of interpretation. Consequently, the task of re-discovering and re-articulating Christian faith is never over and done with but rather to be thought of in terms of a continuous process. This raises the question as to how we are to conceive the relationship between the Christian and the non-Christian perspective(s). Consider the following statement:[263]

> Given that the notion of a contextless reason [$reason_1$], without presuppositions and affective practical commitments, is a fiction (as recent philosophy, both analytic and continental, has tended to conclude), then it is with and not contrary to reason [$reason_2$] to suggest that a well-established community and tradition may undertake to articulate its own implicit reasonings [$reason_3$].

The insight that there is no contextless reason *as conceived by Enlightenment philosophy* ($reason_1$) is itself a *contextless* insight, i.e. it is based on a *contextless* reason ($reason_2$). Unless $reason_1$ and $reason_2$ are (regarded as) two different things, the above quotation is nonsensical. That is to say, the rejection of the notion of a 'contextless reason without presuppositions and affective practical commitments' by analytic and continental philosophy means that a contextless reason cannot serve as a foundation for *life-orientation* and its psychological, political, aesthetical etc. aspects. In other words, $reason_1$ stands for the theologically heretical and philosophically implausible Enlightenment attempt to accept as reasonable only that which is ideologically neutral, universal and publicly defensible. Yet the critique of this understanding of reason, i.e. the acknowledgement that the notion of $reason_1$ is an illusion, is not just a theological but also a philosophical insight. That is, it is an insight based on *$reason_2$*. And it is precisely because of this $reason_2$-based insight that the attempt by a well-established community and tradition to articulate its own implicit reasoning ($reason_3$) is perfectly reasonable. In other words, the transition from $reason_1$ to $reason_2$ can be understood as an inner-philosophical critique.

What needs to be clarified, then, is the relationship between the specifically theological $reason_3$ and the philosophical $reason_2$. This leads back to the hermeneutical question of in what way the Christian *Logos* is 'given' or 'manifest' in Christian acts of interpretation.

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[261] J. Milbank, *Knowledge*, 33.
[262] J. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 109, 126, 133.
[263] Ibid., 109.

Milbank approves of George Lindbeck's and Hans Frei's metanarrative realism[264], which aims to situate the world within the Christian narrative, rather than the Christian narrative within the world. Yet he criticises the former for emphasising the paradigmatic setting of narratives at the expense of their syntagmatic development. As a result, Lindbeck's account of metanarrative realism is dangerously ahistorical since it 'hypostasises' narratives in the sense of atemporal categories which serve as organising *schemas* for diverse cultural contents. These fixed narratives are to a certain extent 'applied' or transferred to in principle neutrally conceived cultural situations and contexts. Due to this historical insulation of Christian narratives from their historical genesis, Lindbeck's metanarrative realism is converted into a "narratological foundationalism".[265] A "genuine metanarrative realism", on the other hand, "would have to pay attention to the play between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic".[266] This means that[267]

> … we do not relate the story of Christ by schematically applying its categories to the empirical content of whatever we encounter. Instead, we interpret this narrative in a response which inserts us in a narrative relation to the 'original' story. First and foremost, the Church stands in a narrative relationship to Jesus and the gospels, within a story that subsumes both.

Hence one cannot understand what the *meta*-character of this metanarrative realism consists in unless the interpretation of history on the basis of, or better, from *within* the gospel story is *already performed*. Hence salvation is to be thought of as the incorporation of us and the whole world into the community founded by Jesus Christ, which is at once our response to Christ, made possible by the response of the Spirit to Christ. This response can only arise after the earthly presence of Christ and locates the community of believers within the narrative manifestation of divine presence. "Hence the metanarrative is *not* just the story of Jesus, it is the continuing story of the Church, already realized in a finally exemplary way by Christ, yet still to be realized universally, in harmony with Christ, and yet *differently*, by all generations of Christians".[268]

This takes us back to the synchronic level, for the diachronic development of Christian faith cannot be separated from its synchronic presentation but becomes only graspable in and through concrete acts of interpretation. For there is no such thing as an 'essence' or 'core' of Christianity which is then *applied* to a particular context so that one could distinguish between contingent contextual manifestations

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[264] Metanarrative realism is here not be understood as "a story based on, or unfolding foundational reason (Lyotard's sense) but in the sense of a story privileged by faith, and seen as the key to the interpretation and regulation of all other stories", J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 385f.
[265] Ibid., 386.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid., 387. However, Milbank here subordinates Christology to Pneumatology which amounts to a kind of idealism. The story of Christ is no longer regarded as the dynamical object whose continuous interpretations lead to an accumulation of meanings which finally form the biblical text's *Wirkungsgeschichte*. But perhaps Milbank simply wants to emphasise the relative continuity between Israel and the Church. This one-sidedness is avoided in *The Word Made Strange*, 162, where he writes: " … unless the textual and ecclesial representation of Jesus – and so its relationship to Jesus, which must be a kind of 'incarnation' of the procession of the Holy Spirit – is in some sense 'perfect', how could Jesus's perfection be at all conveyed to us?"
[268] J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.

and a timeless and self-identical core. Now this synchronic presentation of Christian faith often draws on philosophical models or insights which are not explicitly derived from the theological tradition but which nonetheless become a constituent of the present Christian interpretation of the world. For instance, the philosophical and therefore general insight ($reason_2$) that there is no such thing as a contextless reason ($reason_1$), but only a plurality of perspectival reasonings ($reason_3$) is fundamental to Milbank's interpretation of Christianity.[269] And even a critique of post-modern and post-analytic philosophy which emphasises that "… a descriptive observer-pluralism is in itself no less aporetic than a descriptive observer-monism"[270], remains a philosophical and hence general insight. However, this statement not only implies that perspectival reason ($reason_3$) is possible and legitimate but that it is *necessary* and *unavoidable*, i.e. that nobody *cannot not* 'choose' (philosophically speaking) his or her life-orientation which is always bound to a particular world-view and tradition.[271] Thus one could say that contemporary philosophy always already *points beyond itself* in the sense that the notion of non-involvement and disinterestedness is unmasked as a philosophical impossibility.

In what way, then, are $reason_2$ and $reason_3$ related to each other?[272] The following tentative remarks all revolve around the distinction between the *historico-hermeneutical* and the *normative-authoritative* aspect of this question. What needs to be investigated is on the one hand the historical conditions of the genesis of a particular Christian interpretation of the world (or practice of Christian interpretation), and the hermeneutical formation of the interpretative strategies used in these interpretations (or practices of interpretation). Yet this aspect is to be distinguished from the issue of according to which criteria the selection of interpretative models is governed, which leads to questions of normativity and authority.

a) The above philosophical statement – that one *cannot not*, under finite conditions, indwell a particular perspective on the world – is not altered or refined in any way if it is accepted by the Christian theologian and 'incorporated' into a theological approach. There might well be total *formal* agreement about this philosophical insight between the theologian and a proponent of a different world-view, but total *material* disagreement about which perspective is really worth indwelling. In other cases, however, the adoption of a philosophical model or terminology may significantly alter its very structure so that discontinuity prevails over continuity. The development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century, on the basis of the two

[269] This is fully acknowledged when he writes, referring to *Theology and Social Theory* that "the present book would not have been conceivable without the writings of Gilian Rose, Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Gilles Deuleuze, Michel Foucault and René Girard", ibid., acknowledgements. Among these thinkers, it is only Stanley Hauerwas who is a theologian in the 'traditional' sense.

[270] I.U. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart*, 179. My translation.

[271] The *philosophical* statement that one 'chooses' – due to the lack of neutral intellectual standards – one particular perspective on the world does by no means clash with the *theological* statement that God chooses the believer. Nor does the term 'choice' imply that one cannot give reasons for a particular decision – in a non-foundationalist way. Furthermore, 'choice' is to be understood as *relative* choice, since we always already inhabit a particular perspective on the world and because there always remains a blind spot that eludes our conscious grasp.

[272] By $reason_3$ I do not mean here perspectival reasoning in general, but *theological* reasoning.

terms *ὑπόστασις* and *οὐσία* is a case in point, since it constituted a major break with Greek metaphysics. However, at that time, theology and philosophy were not considered two different disciplines with distinct domains so that one can either speak of a theological transformation of (Greek) philosophy or simply of an inner-philosophical shift of paradigm. After the Christianisation of pagan Hellenism, not just the theologian could be called a true 'philosopher', a true lover of wisdom, but also the simple and uneducated Christian. That is to say, 'Christian philosophy', had an intellectual as well as a practical and ethical aspect.[273]

b) It seems that there is not always a clear-cut boundary between these two disciplines in contemporary theology and philosophy either. Bultman, for instance, 'deformalised' and hence 're-Christianised' Heidegger's existential analytic which the latter had developed on the basis of thought-categories derived from the historically specific tradition of Christianity.[274] Even if one holds that theology and philosophy are two distinct disciplines, it cannot be denied that there is a certain cross-fertilisation in the history of ideas. This reciprocity, but also the ambiguity that comes with it, can be seen in Milbank's essay *The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn*.[275] As the title suggests, Milbank embarks on the "experiment"[276] to read the linguistic turn as a theological turn. On the one hand he concedes that "… patristic and mediaeval thought was unable entirely to overcome the ontology of substance in the direction of a view which sees reality as constituted by signs and their endless ramifications".[277] Yet he finds in Berkeley, Hamann, Herder and Vico, eighteenth-century Christian thinkers who overcame the rationalist residues inherited from their predecessors. However, the expression 'linguistic turn' is normally associated with a general trend in the philosophy of the twentieth century, and I presume it would be somewhat more difficult to explain this later development with reference to explicitly *Christian* thinkers. This seems to be Milbank's view as well, for he does not endeavour to find theologians who might have initiated philosophy's increasing interest in language in the twentieth century. Thus whereas in the eighteenth century, the Christian thinkers Berkeley, Hamann, Herder and Vico constituted a kind of counterweight to the great Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant, who did not pay attention to the phenomenon of language, in the twentieth century, it was 'secular philosophy' which precipitated the 'linguistic turn'. Accordingly, post-modernity's "embracing of radical linguisticality" was not in the first place something called forth from within the Christian tradition but rather constituted a challenge to theology.[278] According to Milbank, however, this stress on language does not constitute a problem for Christian thought since traditional Christianity "has always been secretly promoted by it".[279] It follows from this that "Christian theology has been able, like

[273] J. Pelican, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 179-183.
[274] J. D. Caputo, *Heidegger and theology*, 275.
[275] J. Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 84-120.
[276] Ibid., 97.
[277] Ibid., 85.
[278] Ibid. Milbank does not use the term challenge but I use it here to make my point that theology had to face something *external*, something that it did not develop from within itself.
[279] Ibid.

sceptical postmodernism, to think unlimited semiosis".[280] But Milbank's argument takes a final turn when he writes that *only* for theology, "… difference remains real difference since it is not subordinate to immanent univocal process or the fate of a necessary suppression" – unlike postmodern nihilism.[281]

The zigzag character of Milbank's argumentation, far from being inconsistent, clearly shows how intricate the interrelationship between theology and philosophy is. However, it is difficult to understand statements of the kind '*only* theology can think …'. To be sure, theologically motivated insights *can* be relevant for philosophy and *have been* relevant in the history of philosophy. But philosophy's task remains to abstract from the particular and to focus on that which can be held independently of any world-view. But whereas in the past, philosophy was itself a 'way of life' (Plato, Aristotle, Stoa, Neoplatonism etc.), it has now become so formal that it cannot directly compete with Christianity. Thus the statement that 'the notion of a contextless reason, without presuppositions and affective practical commitments, is a fiction' *is* a philosophical, and hence a general and trans-perspectival statement which is unproblematic for Christian theology. Thus even if theology provides thought-models, derived from the historically specific tradition of Christianity which are subsequently adopted by 'secular philosophy', this does not mean that statements of the kind 'only Christianity can think …' are acceptable. For the philosopher, who is only interested in the *general*, e.g. in the 'meaning of meaning', but not in the *particular* circumstances under which a theory of meaning was developed, will – in the blinking of an eye – differentiate between the content of particular linguistic unit and its form (e.g. narrative, metaphor, utterance, etc.).

Very often, however, it is the other way round, i.e. theology draws on philosophical insights to present its understanding of reality. In the latter case, the instrumental use of philosophical theories in theology does not really alter those models (philosophically). This, once again, does not exclude the possibility that a *philosophical* approach ('instrumentally used' by theology) has originally Christian roots, i.e. is not really a 'new' insight. Milbank's theological critique of philosophy, however, rejects the possibility of general statements about reality that are not tied to a particular tradition – even if they provide theology with genuinely Christian insights that it might have lost. This seems to be the case regarding Milbank's discussion of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[282]

> … because Gadamer seeks to articulate […] an original, necessary and ongoing supplementation which is yet not violent and subversive in relation to the original. However, it is specious as philosophy, because nothing 'justifies' such a peaceful transmission, such a nomadic *Sittlichkeit*. That it exists, cannot be presented as a universal transcendental claim about how transmission works, but only as a claim of faith and experience that that is how *this* particular tradition works, and that this is the clue to how things really are. And in fact, Gadamer's transcendental hermeneutics presents itself […] as a secularization of the aesthetics implicit in the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation: the Father is only present through the image, the presentations, and representations of Christ through time.

[280] Ibid., 112.
[281] Ibid., 113.
[282] J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 417.

Yet, historically speaking, it cannot be denied that this – according to Milbank – specifically *theological* insight was presented to the intellectual world of the twentieth century as a *philosophical* theory. On the other hand, there are also philosophical critiques of Gadamer's understanding of tradition, which must be distinguished from Milbank's theological remarks.[283]

More importantly, the difference between the Christian understanding of reality and other non-Christian ones, on which Milbank rightly places the stress, can ultimately only be maintained if there *are* points of contact. At least in *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank's takes great pains to demonstrate the primacy of narrativity over other philosophical thought-models.[284] But narrativity is a philosophical thought-category as well, and only does the job so well (i.e. it marks a theological understanding of reality off from secular understandings) *because* it is of a general nature.

c) Thus one needs to ask: Are the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation the criteria on the basis of which theology *assesses* secular thought-models as an ultimate arbiter, or is the Christian tradition rather *assisted* by secular thought to discover the hitherto incompletely comprehended (and inexhaustible?) depth of meaning residing in these doctrines? The differentiation between a *historico-hermeneutical* and a *normative-authoritative* aspect might help clarify things to a certain degree. On the historico-hermeneutical level, theology may very well, (re-)discover its very centre by taking on board – in extreme cases – thought which at first glance appears to be outright anti-Christian (e.g. Nietzsche). The still ongoing debate about Christianity and post-modernity, the attempt to articulate a post-metaphysical understanding of Christian faith as well as the question about the origin of metaphysics and its relationship to Christianity, is a case in point. At times the Church mistakenly resists a widely accepted, so-called 'secular truth' over a long period of time, which may finally turn out to be perfectly compatible with Christian theology or even *the* decisive remedy to purge Christian faith from contaminations.[285] Yet one should nonetheless refrain from describing such occurrences as 'theology's failure to meet the prevailing intellectual standards'. For even if theology is – in some cases – *faced* with certain philosophical insights, i.e. challenged by something *external*, these insights nonetheless only become normative for Christian faith if they are accepted by theology and the Church. This is not to deny that these 'truths' are of a general nature in the sense that they can be regarded as *logoi* which are true even *without* an explicitly Christian perspective on the world. Nonetheless, on the *normative-authoritative* level, the doc-

[283] J.D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 110f. According to Caputo, there is still a kind of 'convergence theory', which does not allow for real difference and perspectivity. However, this is *not* what Milbank criticises him for. Rather, Milbank's point is that every allegedly general statement about reality is an expression of a *secular immanentism*. But at times he relativises this extreme view: "Theology […] must entirely evacuate philosophy, which is metaphysics, leaving it nothing (outside imaginary worlds, logical implications or the isolation of *aporias*) to either do or see, which is not – manifestly, I judge – malicious", *The Word Made Strange*, 50. Now if one puts the emphasis on his remarks in brackets, there seems to be room for philosophy understood in the sense of Abel and Simon.

[284] J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 259-277, 382-388.

[285] Very often, of course, it is the other way round.

trines of the Trinity and Incarnation constitute the ultimate arbiter for even the most abstract philosophical theories. That is to say, the *genesis* and *normativity* of a particular intellectual insight must be kept apart.

2) If Radical Orthodoxy tries to be *more mediating* than Barthianism, this means that a consistently Trinitarian and incarnational theology always has to talk about something else but seeks "to recognise a theological *difference* in such speaking".[286] And there is no public or private aspect of human life that does fall outside the domain of theology. Now if the focus is on the *non-accommodating* character of theology, the Christian perspective on the world is viewed as a highly specific way of symbolising reality – which differs from other perspectives on the world. Consequently, one will resort to thought-categories which are formally general and precisely for this reason suitable to set out the specifically Christian (material) difference.[287] Although these categories must also allow for difference *within* the Christian perspective, they in the first place constitute a point of contact between the most diverse world-views. If the focus is on *mediation*, by contrast, theology needs to spell out the *inner architectonics* of its way of categorising, structuring and differentiating the world. Needless to say that already the categorising itself and not just the way the world is interpreted 'within' these categories must be based on and derived from the Christian *Logos*.

This issue becomes even more pressing on the level of institutions and organisations.[288] Here the question arises as to what function the Church fulfils, whether it can be called an institution (among other institutions), and if yes, how it is related to other institutions. More concretely, the issue needs to be tackled of what kind of *competence* and *authority* the minister/priest/bishop represents, if theology is answerable to him – as John Milbank argues. In this respect, Milbank's reflections on Church hierarchy leave (too) many questions unanswered. For instance, it remains unclear what kind of 'good' or 'excellence' it is that underlies his notion of 'Church hierarchy'.[289] One should at least differentiate between the following types of authority:[290]

theology$_1$ as the discipline which descriptively *and* normatively reflects upon the Christian tradition and tries to establish the grammar, root metaphors, narratives, etc. which form its hermeneutical core. Unlike the philosophy of religion, it tends to place the emphasis on the *material* aspect of these hermeneutical devices rather than the hermeneutical devices themselves. That is to say, it is interested in a *Trinitarian* grammar, the root metaphor of the *cross* or *Love*, or the *Gospel* narratives, etc. Theology in this sense is an *intellectual* and *historical* discipline.

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[286] J. Milbank/G. Ward/C. Pickstock, *Suspending the Material*, 2.

[287] The Gospel *narratives* as opposed to other, non-Christian narratives; the Christian *virtues* faith, hope and love as opposed to other, non-Christian virtues; Christian *root metaphors* as opposed to non-Christian root metaphors, etc.

[288] For a rough definition of institutions and organisations see R. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, 228f.

[289] See J. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 126ff.

[290] The following distinction between theology$_{1/2/3}$ is not directly related to Abel's differentiation between interpretation$_{1/2/3}$.

theology$_2$ as the discipline which *introduces* people into the Christian perspective upon the world by inculcating them with the basic texts of the Christian faith. It does not elucidate the grammar of Christian faith but rather *recites* texts which are grammatically particularly dense and hence apt to fulfil this introductory function; it does not reflect upon root metaphors but rather poetically and playfully *performs* texts which are littered with Christian root metaphors; it does not analyse the Gospel narratives but liturgically *enacts* them.

theology$_3$ as the expertise to interpret a particular *x* in a specifically Christian way. It is that which was called above the skill 'to bring the chain of interpretation to an end'. Recalling the two aspects mentioned above (that theology is supposed to be *less accommodating* but *more mediating* than Barth), one can either place the emphasis on

a) that which all Christian interpreters have *in common* (as opposed to non-Christian interpreters), i.e. a kind of basic interpretative skill that is manifest, for instance, in the three central Christian virtues *faith*, *hope* and *love* (cf. part III).

b) different *fields of competence/authority*, or different *classes of x*, all of which require *Christian* interpretative skills, but which at the same time call for field-specific expertise. Thus b) is strictly speaking not a sub-class of a). Rather, as outlined above, a) regards Christian interpretative practice as opposed to other, non-Christian practices, whereas b) focuses on the internal architectonics of Christian interpretative practice.

Now what kind of competence/authority does the minister/priest/bishop represent? One is tempted to say authority/competence 1) and 2) as well as authority/competence in certain but surely not all fields of authority/competence 3). Given the complexity of modern society and the expert knowledge required to perform highly specific interpretative acts in differentiated spheres of reality, it is impossible that these various skills could be mastered by a single person, office or institution. This is not to say that the present differentiation of modern society must necessarily be accepted by Christian theology in its present manifestation. What is at stake here, is the more general insight that if Christianity wants to be less accommodating but more mediating (than Barthianism), the question of differentiation has to be taken seriously: „Es geht nicht darum, den Klerus vom apostolischen Dienst am Wort, von den Altären und dem Gebet abzukoppeln und sie in zweitrangige Politiker, Kooperatoren, Ärzte und Agronomen zu verwandeln, sondern darum, dass alle diese gesellschaftlichen Mitarbeiter, sofern sie Söhne der Kirche sind, im Rahmen ihres Faches zur planmässigen Durchsetzung des christlichen Ansatzes dort einbezogen werden, wo die heidnischen und sogar antichristlichen Anschauungen herrschen".[291]

Furthermore, every tradition which aims at the realisation of a concrete good, will distinguish between proponents who embody this good to a higher or lesser degree. This inevitably leads to the development of aristocratic-hierarchic structures – which

[291] A. Kartašov, *Kirche, Geschichte, Russland*, 246, 250, quoted in K. Kostjuk, *Der Begriff des Politischen in der russisch-orthodoxen Tradition*, 324.

may be counterbalanced by democratic elements in the sense that the truth first and foremost resides in the Church *as a whole*.

The combination of these two factors, i.e. differentiation ('theology'$_{1\text{-}3a/b}$) *and* the aristocratic-hierarchic element makes it impossible to speak of *one* hierarchy within the Church. For instance, the main skills required of clergy is theology$_2$ (and to a certain extent theology$_1$), but as for instance the Donatist controversy made clear, theological excellence in the sense of theology$_{3a}$ is not indispensable for a valid exercise of Church ministry – let alone theology$_{3b}$. Furthermore, the Church has always accepted charismatic authority, understood in terms of theology$_{3a}$, outside the boundaries of Church hierarchy and canonised people not only for a virtuous way of life (in the sense of interpersonal sensitivity and love) but also for various achievements in the service of the Church (which fall into the category of theology$_{3b}$).

This is not to question the usefulness and indispensability of the episcopate and the traditional Church hierarchy, or to replace the traditional understanding of hierarchy by another one. Rather, it is an attempt to elaborate on the already existing richness of Church life and its internal differentiation, which could be described in terms of a complex, interrelated network of *different* hierarchies which *mutually intersect*. To give an example, there could be a hierarchy exclusively based on theology$_{3a}$, provided that the three basic virtues faith, love and hope are interpreted in the broadest possible sense and are not viewed as dispositions which merely regulate the interpersonal aspect of human life.[292] For it is in principle possible to regard all other types of theology as *instances of theology$_{3a}$*. As already mentioned, theology$_{3a}$ is strictly speaking not one type of authority among others (within the Christian perspective on the world), but rather comprises any specifically Christian interpretative skill viewed over against other, non-Christian interpretative skills. Accordingly, the most diverse Christian skills have a point of contact or a common centre, namely their specifically *Christian* character. For this reason, they can to a certain extent be 'assessed' according to a common standard, the Christian *Logos*, despite their diversity, which allows for the establishment of something like a hierarchy.

It follows from this that if the issue of differentiation is taken seriously, the conceptions of hierarchy set forth by Christianised Neoplatonists such as Nicholas of Cusa or Pseudo-Dinoysius Areopagita, on which Milbank is drawing, are insufficient.[293] To be sure, there is much to be learned from these thinkers on the level of theology$_{3a}$. But their Trinitarian reworking of Neoplatonic monism remains incomplete so that the *unity*-in-difference always goes at the expense of real *difference*-in-unity. In any case, many questions about how these traditional models of hierarchy can be refined so as to allow for real differentiation remain unanswered in the writings of Radical Orthodoxy.

Now the insight that a genuine Christian existence is not limited to a clerical or monastic vocation was reemphasised by the reformers of the sixteenth century. And

[292] Thus in extreme cases and under highly specific circumstances, even the successful completion of a military campaign can be interpreted as an act of charity.
[293] See J. Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 126ff.

there is one tradition which deserves particular attention as regards the question of differentiation: *Neocalvinism*. To this I shall turn now.

b) The Neocalvinist contribution

Neocalvinism rejects any hierarchical view of society as a whole and advocates an order which is *structurally pluralistic*. No social community includes the other as part so that the idea of a single all-encompassing community is excluded. Consequently, no institution can rightfully claim to have an all-encompassing authority either. Rather, there is a plurality of types of communities and each of these social spheres has its own distinctive structural purpose and internal organisation. Likewise, each community is entitled to establish its own rules of operation and to make its own decisions about how it wants to achieve its structural purpose. Thus each community enjoys *sphere sovereignty*, a principle designed to protect a community whose structural purpose is defined by one aspect of reality from interference from other communities who are qualified by a different aspect.[294]

All aspects of reality are distinct, mutually irreducible but at the same time inseparable. "On our view, then, *there is no single social institution or authority which is supreme over all the rest*".[295] According to Clouser, this principle already governed Calvin's theology in the sixteenth century and was invoked to resolve the theologico-political deadlock over whether the state or Church was the supreme authority. Calvin tried to overcome this impasse by saying that while Church and state are supposed to exercise authority in *different* spheres, most aspects of private or public life are not governed by either one. This opened up space for further differentiation.

According to Clouser, it is impossible to illustrate the nature of a society organised by the principle of sphere sovereignty with a two-dimensional diagram. Hence he provides us with two different schemas. In the first diagram (see Figure 1[296]), the centre of the circle represents the individual person who is related to all of these aspects, wholly independent of whether or not this person actively takes part in the communities centrally qualified by these aspects.

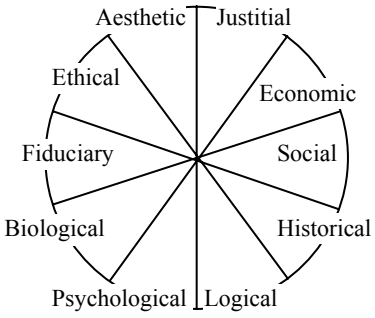


Figure 1

[294] R. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, 249.
[295] Ibid., 257.
[296] Figure 1 is a slightly altered version of the diagram in ibid., 259.

Justitial:	State
Economic:	Business, Labor Union, Stock Market
Social:	Caste, Peerage, Social Register, Club
Historical:	Museum, Archive
Logical:	School
Psychological:	Counselling Service, Therapist, Asylum
Biological:	Hospital, Clinic, Gym
Fiduciary:	Church, Synagogue, Mosque, Political Party
Ethical:	Marriage, Family, Foundation, Orphanage
Aesthetic:	Orchestra, Art Gallery, Dance Troupe, Theatre, Sports Team

This first diagram clearly brings to expression that sphere sovereignty is based on the notion of *non-subordination* and *genuine pluralism*: Each slice of the circle is on the same level. However, there is nonetheless a certain 'hierarchy' which is not satisfactorily represented in the first diagram. The second diagram is therefore designed to bring out this second dimension of sphere sovereignty and contains "a view of several social communities as they range across aspects, from their foundational to their leading functions, according to their type laws".[297] Let me briefly discuss the key terms used by Clouser.

Negatively speaking, what underlies the principle of sphere sovereignty is the traditional Christian understanding of evil as the attribution of a divine, self-existent status to something non-divine, i.e. to an aspect of creation.[298] As a consequence, the status of the remaining aspects (of creation) is reduced: either they are viewed as being *dependent* on those/that aspect(s) which are/is regarded as divine, or they are *eliminated* altogether in favour of the latter. In both cases the power and importance of the divinised aspect(s) is *over*estimated and the power and importance of the corresponding aspects which are non-divine *under*estimated. Now Clouser puts forward two principles in order to guard against the danger of the aforementioned reductionism. On the one hand, there is the *principle of pancreationism*: "*Everything other than God is his creation and nothing in creation, about creation, or true of creation is self-existent*".[299] On the other hand he adduces the *principle of irreducibility*: "*no aspect of creation is to be regarded as either the only genuine aspect or as making the existence of any other possible*".[300]

This non-reductionist approach allows Clouser to heuristically distinguish between different 'laws' which he interprets as the divine orderliness embedded in creation.[301] However, there is a certain tension in his thought: on the one hand this orderliness almost has the status of an 'ontological structure' within the framework of a theology of creation. Yet Clouser at the same time points out that the working list of laws he provides is not supposed to be final or complete but can be supple-

[297] Ibid., 258.
[298] Rom 1:25; S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 61: "Man always devotes himself to an *order*. Only, unless there is supernatural illumination, this order has as its centre either himself or some particular being or thing (possibly an abstraction) with which he has identified himself (e.g. Napoleon, for his soldiers, Science, or some political party, etc.) It is a perspective order".
[299] R.Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, 202.
[300] Ibid.
[301] For a list of these laws see Figure 2 below.

mented or modified if this turns out to be necessary. This however raises the question as to whether these two statements can be held together consistently. What 'ontological status' does this divine orderliness have and how can we distinguish between contingent and non-contingent elements? There are some brief remarks which indicate that Clouser – similar to Abel and Peirce – wants to transcend the distinction between objectivism (e.g. Aristotle) and subjectivism (e.g. Kant), which could be interpreted in Trinitarian terms. However, this project is not really carried out. All he says is that "both objects and subjects are governed and connected by being governed by the same divinely ordained law framework".[302]

Now the below list of aspects – read from bottom to top – is supposed to represent the *pre-theoretical* order in which these aspects appear in things we experience. This is also where the aforementioned 'hierarchical' element comes into play. Pretheoretical experience reveals that there is a certain order to the way things exhibit these aspects, i.e. *the lower aspects are the preconditions for the higher ones*. For instance, whereas the historical aspect of creation is inconceivable without the biotic, the sensory and the logical, the fiduciary aspect stands at the top of the list since *it presupposes all of the other aspects* (see Figure 2).[303] Clouser therefore articulates a third principle which is related to the aforementioned statement, namely that of *aspectual inseparability*: "This means that *aspects cannot be isolated from one another; their very intelligibility depends on their connectedness*".[304]

As regards human artefacts, Clouser further distinguishes between the *foundational* and the *leading function* of aspects.[305] The qualifying aspect of a thing is "*the aspect whose laws guide and regulate the internal organization or development of the thing considered as a whole*".[306] For instance, we consider a rock as a 'physical' thing or a plant as a 'living' thing because it is the physical and biotic aspects respectively which primarily govern the internal organisation of this object/organism. It is not that the rock and the plant are *only* physical or biotic, but the laws of their qualifying aspect are the predominant factors as regards their internal organisation and development.[307] However, the notion of the qualifying aspect is insufficient to explain the genesis and structure of human artefacts. Whereas stones have a physical qualifying function, the transformation of stones into a house can only be achieved by following highly complex procedures according to a certain *plan*. The qualification of human artefacts thus entails three different aspects: first, the natural *material* used for its production, second, the *process* by means of which this transformation is carried out, and thirdly, the *plan* according to which this process is conducted. Now the first two aspects Clouser calls the *foundational* function of an artefact and the third one its *leading* function. Put differently, the foundational functions consist of

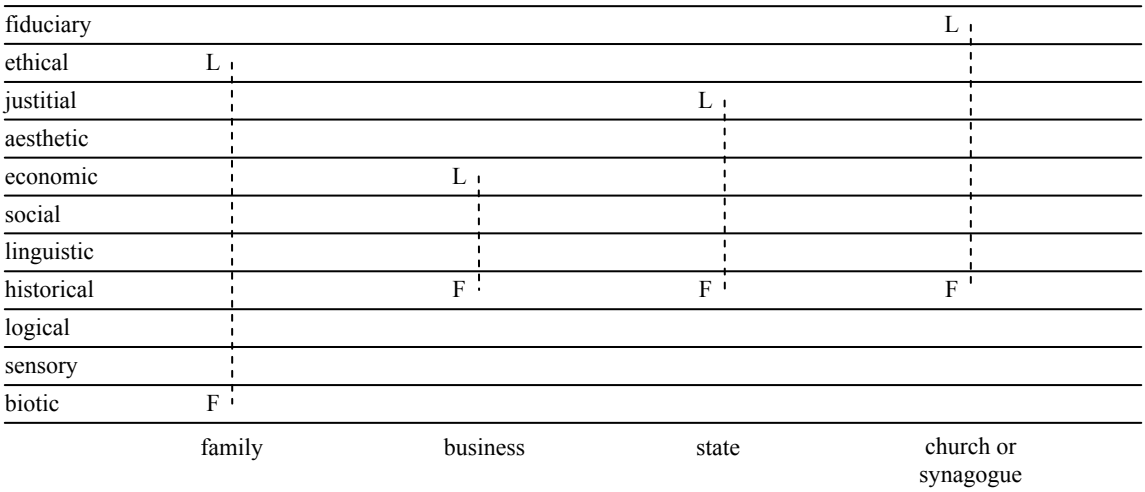
[302] Ibid., 209.
[303] Clouser explicitly points out that his understanding of preconditionality has nothing to do with the historical unfolding of these properties through time, ibid., 210.
[304] Ibid., 217.
[305] There is no room here for a comprehensive account of Clouser's extremely sophisticated theory of reality, see ibid., ch. 11.
[306] Ibid., 218.
[307] Ibid.

the qualification of the natural material and of the qualification of the process of formation resulting in a particular artefact. In most cases the latter, i.e. the second foundational function, assumes the form of a 'historical' or 'cultural' process.

For instance, the style in which a house is designed is always informed by a particular historical period and culture and/or contributes to the development of a new cultural epoch. Thus the (second) foundational function of a house is historical. Clouser then turns to a house's *leading function*. Although a house undoubtedly does serve human biological needs, its leading function is not biological. Unlike the lodge of a beaver for instance, a house, as a human artefact, is *more* than just biological shelter. Its ground plan, the design and seize of its rooms as well as the furnishings make it a place for various kinds of social exchange and also indicate the owner's social status. Unless the erection of a building is governed by such social purposes, we do not call it a house. Thus Clouser concludes that the leading function of a house is *social*.

Let me now return to the question of authority and the relationship between the one *Logos* and the many *logoi*. Figure 2 shows the foundational and leading functions of the family, business, state and Church or synagogue. However, in what follows I shall confine myself to the Church and the fiduciary aspect which is its leading function. The term 'fiduciary' refers to the reliability or trustworthiness of a thing or person. But because it stands for all kinds of trustworthiness and certitude, it is also related to *religious faith*. The fiduciary aspect therefore immediately concerns that which is self-existent and all-sustaining with respect to everything else; that which is unconditionally reliable due to its unconditioned existence.[308] In Christian faith, this divine status is assigned to the Trinitarian God. And the Church, with its fiduciary leading function, is supposed to inculcate the central beliefs or practices of Christian faith.[309]

Figure 2



F = Foundational function
L = Leading function

[308] Ibid., 208.

On the one hand, as Figure 1 shows, the fiduciary sphere is *one among others*. Looked at from this perspective, activities related to Church life are activities like any others. The believer, who goes to Church, is present at a particular *site* where he spends a certain amount of *time*; and he cannot be at another place at the same time – but he could have gone to another place, and he could have spent some time there. Similarly, the priest/minister takes up a certain *occupation* after the completion of a certain *training*, And this occupation makes it impossible for him to pursue another, alternative career. In this sense, theology$_1$ and theology$_2$ are activities among other, non-theological ones. However, according to the principle of *aspectual inseparability*, even activities that fall into the fiduciary sphere could not be carried out without the other aspects. This is expressed in Figure 2 and leads back to Clouser's distinction between the foundational and the leading function.

On the other hand, the fiduciary sphere, which is the leading function of the Church, is not just one among others, but the *most important one*. For this reason it is *at the top* of Figure 2. It is that sphere which is supposed to determine how Christians understand all aspects of human life from biology up to ethics (although it is at the same time *dependent* on the lower spheres, according to the principles of inseparability and irreducibility). In this sense, theology$_1$, theology$_2$ (and theology$_{3a}$) belong to the fiduciary sphere and are the *conditions of possibility* for theology$_{3b}$. Without theology$_1$ and theology$_2$ the Christian tradition would cease to exist, i.e. it would be impossible to develop a specifically Christian understanding of ethics, justice or aesthetics, etc.[310] Without theology$_1$ and theology$_2$ there could be no theology$_{3a}$, and hence no theology$_{3b}$ either. As indicated above, the relationship between theology$_{3a}$ and theology$_{3b}$ is as follows: they do not constitute two different realms of activities but theology$_{3a}$ is that aspect of theology$_{3b}$ which makes the latter specifically Christian. For this reason it belongs to the fiduciary sphere. With respect to Clouser's terminology, one could say that the spheres correspond to activities which fall into the category of theology$_{3b}$ (even if the *fiduciary* sphere comprises theology$_1$ and theology$_2$). But although theology$_{3b}$ is dependent on theology$_1$ and theology$_2$, one cannot infer from this that a person who acquired competence in theology$_1$ and theology$_2$ automatically possesses competence in a discipline belonging to theology$_{3b}$.

[309] According to Neocalvinism, the fiduciary sphere comprises not just the Church but also other religious institutions such as the mosque or synagogue. However, this aspect of the theory is of no importance for the present considerations.

[310] The same cannot be said of theology$_{3b}$. In totalitarian and anti-Chritian states, for instance, the believers may neither have the financial nor the intellectual resources to embark on a *comprehensive* (re-)interpretation of the world (theology$_{3b}$). But even if the orientational function of Christian faith is severly limited at times (quantitatively as well as qualitatively) this does not mean that the Christian tradition has come to an end.

Part III: Divine speech: the 'non-literal' understanding

As repeatedly emphasised throughout part II, divine speech in Barth need not necessarily be understood in terms of a 'concrete act of interpretation' that terminates the chain of signifiers leading to the performance of an action. There are many passages in the *Prolegomena* which point in a different direction. For instance, Barth writes that human beings can and must be determined through the Word of God in their existence, i.e. in the "*totality of their self-determination*" (*KD* I/1, 224, emphasis mine), and that our lives are supposed to participate in the events recorded in the Gospel narrative (*KD* I/2, 794). This approach was further developed in *KD* IV in the direction of a narrative theology (which served as the starting point for the Yale school). Here divine speech is neither (directly) related to the interpretation of a particular *x* as *y*, nor to the interpretation of a field of *xs*. On the one hand the above considerations lead to anthropological questions as regards the narrative identity or self of the human interpreter, on the other to that element which all acts of interpretation of a person with a particular world-view have in common.[1]

In line with this 'non-literal' interpretation of divine speech, it has been pointed out by theologians working in the wake of Barth that the experience of faith should not be conceived of by analogy with an act of perception.[2] Rather, as these thinkers argue, divine speech is to be viewed as the paradigmatic experience of Christian faith in which a human being experiences Jesus of Nazareth as God's address and therefore as Jesus *Christ*. This address has a paradigmatic character as it organises the total experience of Christians from a particular viewpoint. Accordingly, it is to be understood as an "experience with experience"[3], rather than a specifically *religious* or *Christian* experience besides other, *non*-religious experiences. In other words, "God is a discovery which teaches us to see *everything* with new eyes".[4] As Dalferth puts it: "[I]t is one thing to have experiences in the light of the paradigm, quite another to have the paradigmatic experience itself".[5] Applying the terminology used in the first part of this essay, one could construe this paradigmatic experience either as a transition from one perspective upon the world to another, what the Christian tradition calls 'conversion', or as a shift to a deeper understanding of an already 'inhabited' perspective.

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[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff places the stress on the anthropological aspect of this alternative understanding of divine speech but comes to the conclusion that the meaning of the word 'speech' is stretched to its very limits: "That which God said in Jesus Christ and is presented to me by Scripture and contemporary proclamation – that must be made "to grab me". God must so act on me that I am "grabbed" by the content of what God has already said. I see no reason to call this action "speech"", N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 72f.

[2] I.U. Dalferth, *Kombinatorische Theologie*, 154f.

[3] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 225, 40f, 137, 246, 381, 517.

[4] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 149.

[5] I.U. Dalferth, *Religiöse Rede von Gott*, 472. My translation.

Accordingly, this second type of communication leads to completely different hermeneutical questions than speech which is supposed to bring the concatenation of signs to an end. In part II, the issue was how a particular being or phenomenon is construed at a particular time, within a particular context, and from a particular perspective. This hermeneutical situation was characterised by the formula *s (= sender) interprets (or sets) x as y to a (= addressee) in the context c.* In this third part, it is the 'as-structure' itself, as it were, that which underlies all acts of interpretation performed from the same viewpoint, which takes centre stage. For this reason, it is necessary to abstract from any concrete *x* or class of *xs* and to focus on that which is common to all acts of interpretation. More specifically, what is analysed is the 'hermeneutical tools' by means of which the transition from one or several interpretative perspective(s) to another perspective is accomplished. On the one hand this kind of communication must introduce the addressee to a *new* perspective and is therefore fundamentally *innovative*; on the other hand it has to *mediate* between the *old* and the new perspective(s) and thus fulfils a *mediatory* function.

Within a theological context, this is clearly – unlike the questions discussed in part II – the hermeneutical paradigm of Church proclamation par excellence. What is far from self-evident, however, is the belief that speech and address, as conceived of by Barth and other Protestant theologians, is the most suitable mode of communication to fulfil this task of initiation and mediation. In what follows I shall examine Eberhard Jüngel's account of divine speech as an 'experience with experience', in which Barth's theology of the Word is combined with elements of Heidegger's later philosophy. In order to get a clearer grasp of Jüngel's theological intention, I shall first address the issue of the 'experience with experience' from an ontological point of view.

1 The ‘experience with experience’: Eberhard Jüngel

A) The ontological basis

Jüngel points out that from the beginning of metaphysics, actuality was assigned ontological priority over possibility.[6] For Aristotle, being can only properly be attributed to that which is actual – but not to the possible. Although he rejects the view that only the actual is possible, and maintains that things which are *not*, are certainly *possible*, he nonetheless holds that the possible *does not exist*, that it has *no being*. Being and actuality can thus be equated. According to Jüngel, however, even if Christian eschatology was often wrongly conceived in terms of a (mere) actualisation of (inherent) possibilities, a consistently Christian theology has to do away with the Aristotelian primacy of actuality over possibility. Arguing on the basis of the doctrine of the justification by faith, Jüngel stresses that in *biblical* usage, ‘righteousness’ depends on a divine imputation rather than on actuality.[7] We do not become righteous by acting righteously, i.e. by acquiring a particular habitus (or ἕξις), but rather first become righteous and are made righteous, and are thus enabled to act in a way which corresponds to this righteous state. Put differently, a new way of life is based on and preceded by a *change of being*, which means that the transition from *homo peccator* to *homo iustus* is thought of in *ontological* terms. This *(re)constitutio ex nihilo* implies the notion of the totality of the fall, which deprived creation of all being so that a divine intervention is required to make human beings exist (again).

In Jüngel’s view, the distinction between the *possible* and the *impossible* is more fundamental than the difference between the actual and the ‘not-yet-actual’, since it concerns the difference between *God* and the *world*. It is God who distinguishes between the impossible and the possible, but the fallen world constantly identifies the impossible with the possible and thus denies the fact that it is created. In the event of the Word, God relates to the world by making the impossible to be impossible and the possible to be possible. To put this in theological language, the Word of God occurs as a “word of promise and judgment”.[8]

Similar to Barth, Jüngel adheres to a theory of total discontinuity between old and new creation: The *ex nihilo facere* is always (theologically) preceded by an *in nihilum redigere*.[9] The divine judgment *annihilates* the sinner’s actuality but at the same *constitutes* him as a sinner whose hope is exclusively set on God. The way this transition is thought of leads to a dichotomy between divine action and human passivity. This is most evident when Jüngel writes that the justified person does not hope “for

[6] I am following E. Jüngel, *Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit.*.
[7] Cf. E. Jüngel, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens*, ch. 2 and 3.
[8] E. Jüngel, *Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*, 223.
[9] Ibid., 224.

any particular future worldly actuality, but only *for* God's creative Word".[10] He continues:[11]

> From a theological point of view, 'hope' *in* a particular future worldly actuality is *the exact opposite* of the kind of hope in God alone which hopes for a future *for* the world [italics mine]. The future *actuality* of the world is not a matter of *hope*; it is *made*. It belongs to the context of worldly action; it is a matter of calculation and cannot do with hopes any more than we can work with hope in constructing an aeroplane or in pursuing historico-critical inquiry into the past. The future actuality of the world is something which can be made …

By maintaining that the distinction between the possible and the impossible is more fundamental and more necessary than the distinction between the actual and the possible, Jüngel tries to emphasise the *radical newness* brought about by divine revelation. If the focus is on the distinction between the possible and the actual, no such radical newness is conceivable since the actual then merely results from the realisation of possibilities from a pre-given and immanent range of possibilities. The future that 'can be made', as Jüngel calls it, on the basis of past and present, does not count as a genuinely new, i.e. eschatological possibility. Rather, it merely represents that which is *not yet* realised and actual, and therefore belongs to the realm of (immanent) actuality. By contrast, the world's real, eschatological possibility is "external to its actuality".[12]

Now the question arises as to how this external possibility is *related* to the (internal) actuality of the world. According to Jüngel, it is the *event of the Word*, which fulfils this mediatory task and renders the possible *concrete*. The concept of the word event is supposed to solve the epistemic problem of how the (externally) possible can 'verify' its possibility *in* the actuality of the world. For Jüngel, there are two dangers which need to be avoided. On the one hand, the external possibility is not supposed to be determined by the actuality of the world. Given that the possible is actuality's *ultimate concern*, verification of the possible in the actual cannot mean conformity with the conditions of actuality, for this would merely turn (external) possibility into (immanent) actuality. For Jüngel this happens if the coming of the Kingdom of God is wrongly interpreted in terms of a "revolutionary postulate or as a sanctioning of the present order".[13] This is problematic because the actual is only a conditional and not an absolute and ultimate concern of actuality. On the other hand, if any determination of possibility by actuality is denied, no 'verification' is possible at all. Possibility then becomes completely irrelevant to actuality. Furthermore, such a view would inevitably lead to a kind of authoritarianism, replacing verification by *submission*. Yet, according to Jüngel, the authority of the Word of God avoids authoritarianism "by giving *itself* […] to be understood".[14]

Jüngel elaborates on this last statement by interpreting the authority of the possible as *the authority of given freedom*, an authority which creates a *space of freedom* in actuality. Within this space, time is given to develop trust in that which is possible.

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[10] Ibid. Italics mine.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 227.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 228.

Consequently, the presence of the possible in the actual mediated by speech-events cannot assume the form of a command requiring immediate obedience, but must rather be seen as a *divine plea*. For Jüngel, it is the parables told by Jesus, which most authentically represent the aforementioned type of discourse. With his emphasis on time and freedom, Jüngel seems to have overcome Barth's actualism that conceives revelation in terms of a series of punctual events. However, a closer look reveals that he remains relatively close to his teacher's theology of the Word. For the time granted to the hearer of the word event is basically limited to the time required to narrate the parable, and his freedom culminates in, but also *ends with* the climatic point of the parable.[15] That is to say, freedom is viewed as the empowerment of the hearer to make the right decision; a decision which is no longer possible to postpone, or to avoid altogether. When the climax of the parable is reached, the hearer *has* to make a decision 'within actuality', and he *has* to act.

Since the parable, which Jüngel interprets as a 'narrative metaphor', is for him the genre par excellence regarding 'the experience with experience', it now needs to be examined at greater length.

B) Parables as 'narrative metaphors'

In the fourth part of his book *God as the mystery of the world*, Jüngel reflects on the speakability of God. After a detailed critique of the tradition's understanding of God's ineffability and incomprehensibility in the Middle Ages (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, John of Damascus)[16], he turns to a discussion of *the problem of analogous talk about God.*[17] What is rejected is not the notion of analogy as such, but only the concept of analogy set out by thinkers such as Kant and Aquinas. The details of this critique are of no concern here.

In § 18, Jüngel develops his own approach to the speakability of God by interpreting the *Gospel* as analogous talk about God. This leads to what he calls an *analogy of advent*. According to him, the human being Jesus can be considered the divine parable par excellence, and enables us to speak authentically of God; a quality which human language as such, does not possess. Yet the proclamation of Jesus as the parable of God, i.e. as Christ, was preceded and made possible by *Jesus' own* proclamation of the *parables about the kingdom of God*. For this reason Jüngel calls the parable the genre which is most representative of Jesus' proclamation and interprets it as an "extended metaphor" – and metaphor as "abbreviated parable".[18] Whereas a parable *narrates*, a metaphor summarises the narrative in *one single word*. Furthermore, both parable and metaphor are *addressing speech*: "What is *expressed* in the form of metaphor and parable, *addresses one* (*spricht an*)".[19]

[15] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 401.
[16] Ibid., 316-357.
[17] Ibid., 357ff.
[18] Ibid., 396.
[19] Ibid.

a) The relationship with the rhetorical tradition

Jüngel's theory of metaphor differs from that of the rhetorical tradition, which tended to reduce metaphorical talk to a mere *illustration* of something that can in principle be said literally.[20] Consequently, he also rejects the notion of a *tertium comparationis* that is known right from the beginning and emphasises the genuinely *innovative* character of this trope.[21]

In accordance with his ontological reflections outlined above, Jüngel points out that religious language assigns to reality *more* than it seems to be and relates to the actual *by going beyond it*. Judgements of faith do justice to reality by augmenting its being, thus leading to a new conception of reality. According to Christian faith, these new possibilities are not inherent in reality but are to be thought of as *donum* and *potentia aliena*, even if they nonetheless belong to the being of the real.[22]

Now the rhetorical tradition viewed metaphorical talk in terms of a deviation from ordinary linguistic usage: "A metaphor is the application of a noun which properly applies to something else …".[23] The noun which assumes a metaphorical meaning signified a different state of affairs in ordinary language usage. It comes to signify a new state of affair *by transference* and hence constitutes a deviation from convention. Yet, according to Aristotle, metaphor must be considered 'luxury' in the sense that it has a place in rhetorical speech, but is unsuitable and inappropriate for dialectical speech, which is concerned with truth. Here Jüngel's interpretation of metaphor deviates from that of the rhetorical tradition. Speech which addresses, as it is characteristic of metaphor and parable, is considered *proper speech*, and not merely a deviation from statements that are concerned with the *logos* and truth. Jüngel underlines the fundamentally metaphorical quality of all language, which is not opposed to truth but rather allows us to think of truth in terms of *event* and *discovery*, and which he associates with *the transfer of being into language*: "Metaphors expand the horizon of understanding by abolishing the fixation upon actuality with that which is possible, thus *intensifying* the Being of beings (*das Sein von Seiendem*)".[24]

Thus on the one hand, Jüngel's metaphorology constitutes a *break* with the rhetorical tradition insofar as metaphorical speech is attributed a genuinely innovative character, and is no longer reduced to mere illustration of something that can be said in a literal way as well. On the other hand, Jüngel *follows* the rhetorical tradition insofar as (this genuine) innovation is still inextricably bound to *orality*, the concept of *event* (or language event, as he calls it following other proponents of the Hermeneutical Theology) and *address*.

Jüngel seeks to develop Barth's conception of God's self-revelation by drawing on Heidegger's later philosophy. As far as Barth is concerned, the event-character of the divine word, which dominates the *Prolegomena*, seems to a certain extent to reappear as the *point*, *punch line* or *climax* of the parable, which Jüngel compares to

[20] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 107, 112, 132f.
[21] Ibid., 402, cf. E. Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus*, 138.
[22] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 103.
[23] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1457b: „μεταφορὰ δέ ἐστιν ὀνόματος ἀλλοτρίου ἐπιφορὰ…".
[24] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 154.

that of a joke which makes us laugh: "Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God are *events* whose points are supposed to 'ignite' in the hearer himself […] And with the point the kingdom of God *arrives* itself *at* the hearer …".[25] Let me discuss the specific aesthetics of Jüngel's understanding of the parable in greater detail.

b) The aesthetics of metaphor and parable

The aesthetics of metaphor and parable brings about the arrival of new possibilities of meaning. If metaphor and parable are successful, they have a characteristic, *gripping effect* on the hearer, which is due to the mysterious and ungraspable analogy between the unfamiliar and the familiar. Something too alien would not be equally appealing to the hearer and hence more difficult to appropriate. It is only the skilful combination of the familiar with the unfamiliar, as it is characteristic of metaphor and parable that is able to playfully and effortlessly evoke *acceptance* of the new on the part of the hearer: "In metaphorical language, that which is to be learnt is passed on to the one who is addressed as it were in a game".[26] And human beings take pleasure in *quick* (ταχεῖαν) and *easy* (ῥᾳδίως) learning, which leads to an immediate increase in *knowledge* (μάθησις). More precisely, a metaphor is fitting and gratifying if it is *neither* too obvious, so that no scrutiny at all is required to understand it, *nor* completely incomprehensible. It must either convey information at the very moment it is uttered – without being too obvious, i.e. without being absolutely plain to everybody – or at least be understood soon after it has been stated.[27]

This brings us back to Jüngel's insistence on the ontological primacy of possibility over actuality. In metaphor and parable, a certain reality is expressed through *possibilities*. Interestingly, Jüngel nonetheless points out that theses possibilities lead *forcefully* (*zwingend*) "to the discovery of a new dimension of reality and to greater precision in talk about what is real".[28] But how can a divine plea, which grants time and freedom to the human addressee, *zwingend* precipitate a new understanding of reality? At the same time we are told that the speaker *as well as* the addressees of a successful metaphor or relevant parable exercise *creative freedom*: the speaker by freely creating the metaphor, the addressees by letting themselves be addressed (*ansprechen lassen*) and gripped (*fesseln lassen*) by that which was said by the speaker. As far as the speaker, the creator of metaphor is concerned, Aristotle points out that the appropriate use of metaphor is something that cannot be learned from someone else, because it is a natural talent that one either possesses or not.[29]

This last statement raises the questions of whether it is reasonable that Church proclamation relies almost exclusively on the proclamation of the Word of God by one person, the minister. If the genre of the sermon is closer to poetry than to prose, and if artistic talent is rare, can the individual preacher really bear the whole weight

[25] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 401f.
[26] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 127f.
[27] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1410b, 10-25.
[28] "In solcher Rede wird vielmehr eine bestimmte Wirklichkeit durch *Möglichkeiten* so ausgesagt, dass gerade die Möglichkeit zwingend zur Entdeckung einer neuen Dimension der Wirklichkeit und zu einer Präzisierung der Rede vom Wirklichen führt", E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 398.
[29] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1459a.

of this task? Is it not too risky to make the 'success' of proclamation dependent on something as contingent as the minister's artistic gifts? And does not the liturgy constitute a configuration of collectively and historically accumulated 'metaphors', which relieve the celebrant from this heavy burden?

Furthermore, it is worth noticing that even if both speaker and addressee share in the same creative freedom, Jüngel uses *passive language* to describe the act of reception on the part of the addressee. But he insists that there cannot be a contradiction between this creative *freedom* and the aforementioned *forcefulness* (*das Zwingende*) of language. Quite the reverse: the essence of analogy precisely consists in the *unity* between freedom and forcefulness.[30] The reception of (a successful) metaphor is at once an *act* and an *experience*.[31]

It goes without saying that this complex combination of forcefulness and freedom, act and experience, is a specifically aesthetic thought-category. In the following section the focus shall be on the *interrelationship* between the passive and the active aspect.

c) Passivity and activity in the act of reception

As mentioned above, Jüngel – unlike Aristotle – closely links the rhetorical and linguistic aspect of metaphor with ontology and the question of truth. The transfer of being to language is an event: the event of *truth* mediated and accomplished by metaphorical and parabolic speech. Jüngel's main influence in this respect is Heidegger, to whom his article *Metaphorical Truth* is dedicated. He explicitly refers to two of his writings: *Being and Time*, and *On the Essence of Truth*.[32] In what follows I shall first analyse the type of 'passivity' involved in this arrival of Being or truth on the part of the addressee. More specifically, what will be investigated is the Heideggerian meaning of the term (*ἀπο*)*φαίνεσθαι* and the well-known idea of *truth as unconcealment* (*ἀλήθεια*). This analysis will revolve around the concept of the *middle voice*, which is an apt hermeneutical tool to pinpoint imbalances between active and passive aspects in the act of the reception. In the second place, I shall relate the results of this examination to Jüngel's theory of metaphor and parable.

The middle voice is a linguistic and grammatical notion that refers to a third voice beside the active-passive dichotomy and which is significant for a philosophical hermeneutics which tries to go beyond the traditional object-subject divide. It is therefore related to Peirce's triadic understanding of the sign, which equally bypasses the distinction between object and subject, or realism and idealism. In the middle voice, the focus is neither on the subject nor on the object of an action, neither on the agent who acts upon the patient, nor on the patient who is acted upon by the agent, but on "the subject in his or her relation to the process the verb expresses".[33] On the

[30] "Die ursprüngliche sprachliche Einheit von Freiheit und Zwingendem ist aber nichts anderes als das Wesen der Analogie", E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 399.
[31] Cf. P. Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 252.
[32] See E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 142, fn 100: M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*; *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (= *Wegmarken*, 177-202).
[33] P. Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 2.

one hand, the subject is exposed to an event of which he or she is not in control. On the other hand, it is nonetheless actively involved in this event. "In the middle voice, the focus is on the *process* that takes place around the subject acting within it and not on the extent to which the subject is affected. The *locality* and not the affectedness of the subject is at stake […] He or she is part of a process that *encompasses* himself or herself".[34]

According to Scott, Heidegger's use of the middle voice in *Being and Time* runs counter to the active transcendental character which dominates this work.[35] It has a rupturing and de-structuring effect on his own philosophical project of a fundamental ontology and thus constitutes the starting point for his later philosophy. The middle voice can be found, for instance, in his idea of 'language as event' and the 'self-disclosure or concealment of *Dasein*'. In order to disrupt the dominance of subject-oriented language in philosophical discourse about Being, Heidegger uses the middle voice with regard to showing/disclosing (*φαίνεσθαι*) and concealing (*ψεύδεσθαι*). The point of the middle voice is that it is a verb form which cannot simply be replaced by a noun and pronoun since otherwise its specific meaning is lost. For if one resorts to a reflexive structure such as 'that which shows *it-self*', this form no longer denotes the *occurrence* of self-showing and thus distorts what was expressed by the middle voice. That is to say, the 'it' as well as the 'self' obscure the signification of an event that is neither active nor passive nor (necessarily) reflexive.

Scott therefore suggests translating Heidegger's *φαίνεσθαι* as 'bringing to day-light', 'daylighting', or 'brightening': verbs which are supposed to indicate self-showing without the agency of a 'who' or 'what' in the event of self-showing. In speech, something comes to light but always has the double meaning of *ἀπόφανσις* and *αποφαίνεσθαι*. As *ἀπόφανσις* speaking shows that which is spoken of; as *αποφαίνεσθαι* "speaking shows itself coming to light as its own occurrence …".[36] Heidegger seeks to hold both aspects together. If *ἀπόφανσις* is taken in isolation, the specific function of the middle voice – the process of self-showing – is lost, and speaking is reduced to making present, representing and designating. Yet if both functions are taken into account, speaking not only addresses "*what* is shown but a showing itself with the self-showing of what is shown".[37] The speaker fulfils the function of a *medium* and the speaking lets us see that which is talked about.

In his essay *On the Essence of Truth*[38], Heidegger calls the true, be it a true matter or a true proposition, that which accords: the accordant (*das Stimmende*). This can be taken to mean two different things: either truth is the correspondence of the matter to knowledge, or the correspondence of knowledge to the matter. But propositional truth (*Satzwahrheit*) is always based on material truth (*Sachwahrheit*), rather than the other way round. However, in both cases truth is conceived of in terms of a conforming to (*Sichrichten nach*) and hence as correctness (*Richtigkeit*). Reflecting on the

[34] Ibid., 16. Italics mine.
[35] C. Scott, *The Middle Voice in Being and Time*, 159-173.
[36] Ibid., 162.
[37] Ibid.
[38] M. Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 177-202.

inner possibility of accordance, Heidegger raises the question of how a statement can be in accordance with a thing, given that the two relata are manifestly different in their appearance. Evidently, there cannot be a thing-like approximation between the former and the latter. Yet the statement must relate to the thing, presenting (*vorstellen*) it in such a way that the presenting statement presents the thing *as it is*. This can be accomplished if the activity of presenting is conceived of in terms of a letting the thing stand opposed as object (*Entgegenstehenlassen des Dinges als Gegenstand*). This is only the beginning of a complex exposition of how the presenting of a thing is passively affected by that which is opened up (*offenbar*) and present (*anwesend*), namely Being.

Heidegger continues by describing the relation of the presenting statement to the thing as comportment (*Verhalten*); an attitude which is characterised by adhering to something opened up as such: "Comportment stands open (*offenständig*) to beings".[39] Accordingly, the correctness of a statement is dependent on the openness of comportment (*Offenständigkeit des Verhaltens*). It is only through the latter that what is opened up can become the standard for the presentative correspondence.

This openness of comportment, which is called the inner condition of the possibility of correctness, has a ground: *freedom*. Heidegger thus says that the essence of truth is freedom, which he defines – using again passive language – as letting beings be the beings they are. But although he insists that this should not be misunderstood as a kind of neglect or indifference, but rather as an (active) engagement with beings, he quickly returns to passive language so that the nature of this *positive* receptivity remains unclear. A few lines later this engagement with beings is called an engagement with the open region (*das Offene*) and its openness (*Offenheit*) into which every being comes to stand, and this open region is then famously interpreted in terms of the etymological root of *ἀλήθεια*, as unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*). This engagement with the disclosedness of beings is viewed as a "*withdrawal* in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to how and what they are …".[40]

Now from the perspective of the middle voice, there is an *imbalance* as regards Heidegger's use of *(απο)φαίνεσθαι* and *ἀλήθεια*. In both cases, the occurrence or process tends to occlude and eclipse the subject. In (Scott's interpretation of) *Being and Time*, the happening of the event is emphasised at the expense of the recipient or addressee so "that the subject dwindles".[41] Scott rightly stresses that the idea of a middle-voiced event dispenses with the traditional dichotomies between active/passive and subject/object. Something just happens and the stress is placed "on the bringing and coming to light as such".[42] Yet it is one thing to do away with a simple (philosophically no longer plausible) *dichotomy* between subject and object, quite another to *jettison* the subject and to abolish the subject-object distinction altogether. In Scott's interpretation of Heidegger, there is no room left for the subject,

[39] Ibid., 184. „Das Verhalten ist offenständig zum Seienden".
[40] Ibid., 188f. Italics mine.
[41] P. Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 25.
[42] Ibid., 27.

i.e. he fails to involve the subject in the medial event. Even if the stress is placed on the occurrence itself, the subject must still be considered as located *within* this process.

The same holds for Heidegger's essay *On the Essence of Truth*. Truth is here identified with unconcealment (ἀλήθεια) and the subject is passively exposed to this self-revelatory process. This leads to a rather problematic understanding of truth, much criticised by commentators and later called into question by Heidegger himself.[43] From the viewpoint of a middle-voiced philosophy of the self, there is an imbalance since heteronomy is emphasised at the expense of autonomy and passivity prevails over activity. By contrast, a more consistently middle-voiced approach would underline that the "self as the who of action lives *between* autonomy and heteronomy, active and reactive force, pure activity and pure passivity. The grammatical voice of action is the middle voice, neither a sovereign active voice nor a subordinated passive voice".[44]

Yet it is easy to find counterexamples in Heidegger's immensely rich and complex work, which avoid the aforementioned one-sidedness. The beginning of his *Letter on Humanism*, for instance, is middle-voiced, where he reflects on the nature of *thinking*. In thinking, as he points out, Being comes to language and language is the 'house of Being': "In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home".[45] On the one hand, the essence of action is conceived of in terms of *accomplishment*, rather than causation of an effect. This means that the speaking and thinking subject does not create something *ex nihilo*, but only accomplishes what already is: *Being*. On the other hand, the subject, as the *guardian* of his home, is nonetheless actively involved in this process and does not just passively receive Being. Accordingly, thinking is *at the same time* engagement *by* Being and engagement *for* Being (*l'engagement par l'Être pour l'Être*). Put differently, it is engagement of Being (*penser, c'est l'engagement de l' Être*), and the 'of' must be interpreted in terms of both *subjective* and *objective* genitives. Thus any interpretation of language which simplistically distinguishes between 'subject' and 'object' is inappropriate and derived from metaphysics.[46]

In another famous essay, *On the Way to Language* (1959), in which Heidegger reflects on the relationship between language and Being, he comes to similar conclusions.[47] It is basically an exposition of the statement that language is *saying* by *showing* and that the latter be understood as a kind of *event/propriation*.[48] On the one

[43] See E. Tugendhat, *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Hussel und Heidegger*, 259ff; M. Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, 76.
[44] C.O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, 61.
[45] M. Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 313.
[46] Ibid., 313f; cf. P. Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 28.
[47] M. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 229-257.
[48] „*Das Wesende der Sprache ist die Sage als die Zeige*", ibid., 242. „*Das Regende im Zeigen der Sage ist das Eignen*", ibid., 246. Heidegger's use of the terms *eignen*, *er-eignen* and *Er-eignis* all have the double meaning of *to happen*/*event* and *to propriate*/*propriation* or *to own*/*owness* and suggests a *coming-into-its-own* which is lost in any English translation. The verb *to propriate* is taken from the English translation of this essay but does not figure in the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Cf. M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 395f, 422. The translator probably did not want to use the verb *to appropriate* in order to avoid an anthropological reductionism.

hand, showing cannot exclusively and definitively be attributed to human beings, even if it is accomplished by our saying, but is always preceded by a thing's letting itself be shown. For this reason, speaking and hearing occur simultaneously, in the sense that when we speak we at the same time listen to the language we speak. "Wir sprechen nicht nur *die* Sprache, wir sprechen *aus* ihr".[49] On the other hand, Heidegger is aware of the danger of hypostasising language to a phantasm and self-subsistent essence which exists wholly independently of any human discourse. Therefore he adds that language "does remain unmistakably bound up with human speech".[50] What is implied here is again a middle-voiced approach which transcends any subject-object dichotomy.

Yet other commentators develop Heidegger's thought in the opposite direction and reinforce the asymmetry in his work discussed above, which run counter to a middle-voiced interpretation. For Jean-Luc Marion, for instance, a philosophy of the self has to start with the claim that interpellates *me*, summons *me* and isolates *me*, before I have said 'I'. The claim makes me say 'Here I am!' and thus constitutes a *me*, leaving no room for an 'I'. This idea of the 'me' as the interlocuted is then spelled out in terms of four characteristics: *convocation*, *surprise*, *interlocution* and *facticity*, all of which express the utter *passivity* of the interlocuted and the *primordiality* of the interlocutionary event.[51] The details of Marion's sophisticated approach are of no concern here. Yet it is clear that the ideal of passive reception is central to his thought. He explicitly points out that "the response literally says nothing other and nothing more than that which the call or appeal said in the first place …".[52]

d) Immediacy, Evidence and Innovation

These short reflections on passive and active reception in Heidegger bring us back to *Jüngel's* use of Heideggerian thought in his theory of metaphor and parable. As outlined above, Jüngel defines the essence of his 'evangelical analogy' in terms of a unity between freedom (*Freiheit*) and forcefulness (*das Zwingende*), which at first glance seems to be close to a middle-voiced approach. Yet a closer examination reveals that this is not the case and that his theology of the word stresses the passivity of the addressee at the expense of his active involvement. Jüngel's statement that the creative freedom of the recipient consists in his 'letting himself be addressed' (*ansprechen lassen*) and gripped (*fesseln lassen*), will serve as the starting point for a more detailed analysis and critique.

The reception of a successful metaphor can be described as an experience of 'evidence', in the sense that the uttered sentence is immediately, i.e. without any further interpretation understood. The addressee is either *instantly* affected by the metaphor or not at all and no (conscious) interpretative labour is required. This is most evident in Jüngel's example of the joke. Provided the addressee possesses the necessary background knowledge, the point of the joke or parable triggers the addressee's

[49] M. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 243.
[50] Ibid., 244.
[51] J.-L. Marion, *Étant donné*, 369-373.
[52] J.-L. Marion, *The Final Appeal of the Subject*, 103.

laughter almost like a mechanical stimulus. The 'active' interpretative involvement of the addressee comes only to light if children or people from a different culture are present, who lack the necessary background knowledge to feel amused

As the preceding paragraph suggests, the concepts 'immediacy' and 'evidence' need not be related to the idea of an 'ideal' speech-act and a metaphysics of presence but can be reinterpreted within the framework of a philosophy of interpretation. As set out in the first part of this essay, immediate understanding and an experience of evidence occur if the concatenation of signs is brought to an end. Consider the following quotation from Heidegger's *The Way to Language*:[53]

> Event/Propriation (*das Ereignis*), espied in the showing of the saying, can be represented neither as an event nor as a happening; it can only be experienced in the showing of the saying as that which grants. There is nothing else to which propriation/event reverts, nothing in terms of which it might even be explained. Propriating is not an outcome (result) of something else; but it is the bestowal whose giving reaches out in order to grant for the first time something like a 'There is/It gives', which being too needs if, as presencing, it is to come into its own.

The termination of the chain of signifiers eludes representation precisely because *it is a termination*. Whereas in part I the emphasis was placed on the relationship between the end of the chain of signifiers and the resulting action, here Heidegger's main interest is ontology. Yet the question remains the same. 'Propriation/Event' is not representable but ineffable because it designates successful communication, or the successful, i.e. unquestioned showing of something as something. This presupposes a well-functioning practice of interpretation as well as interpreters which are well-acquainted with this practice. At a particular point in time, the signifying function of a sign becomes *evident*, i.e. it is directly understood so that no further mediation is required. This is not to be confused with the idea of *isomorphy*, a direct correspondence between a proposition and an extra-linguistic reality. Rather, evidence and immediacy occur on the level of the performance of signs. It follows that 'propriation' can only be experienced but not explained since it does not denote anything else than the occurrence of the end of interpretation. From Heidegger's ontological perspective, these endpoints of conscious interpretation reveal beings as beings, for the showing of saying in 'propriation' coincides with statements such as 'there is' (an *x*,*y*,*z*).

Not only metaphor and humour, but also the performing and visual arts fall into the category of 'immediate perception'. In the arts, something unique is *shown*, which could not equally be *said* in a non-artistic way, i.e. in conceptual language.[54] This gives the aesthetic experience an *ineffable* character, for the density of meaning, which is characteristic of metaphor/parable and works of art, does not allow for an easy translation into another symbol system. Nelson Goodman's distinction between *analogical* and *digital* signs and symbol systems tries to grasp this significant difference. Whereas the former class comprises metaphorical language and other nonver-

[53] M. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 247.

[54] Cf. G. Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation*, 169-208. Abel is here operating with Wittgenstein's distinction between *saying* and *showing* („Was gezeigt werden *kann*, *kann* nicht gesagt werden", *Tractatus* 4.1212) which cannot be equated with Heidegger's use of these terms. In a nutshell, in Heidegger, saying and showing are two aspects of one and the same event, in Wittgenstein they are directly opposed to each other – as the above quotation reveals.

bal art forms, the latter constitutes the realm of linguistic statements.[55] On the basis of this distinction it is easy to see that a verbal description of a picture, for instance, simply cannot grasp the fullness and density of meanings contained in the work of art and therefore inevitably amounts to a kind of reductionism. Similarly, a metaphor is experienced as fitting even if it is impossible to fully *account for* its fittingness.

Yet the tricky question is how the above outlined (and non-metaphysically conceived) *immediacy* and *evidence* is linked up with *innovation*. It is plausible to emphasise the immediate effect of metaphor/parable (or other, non-linguistic works of art) as opposed, for instance, to a philosophical text. Yet if one takes the *innovative aspect* of metaphor and parable into account as well, it is questionable whether there is nothing else to say about its reception than that the addressee must *let himself be addressed* and *gripped*. In other words, the *immediacy* which is characteristic of the aesthetic experience should not be confused with *passivity*. But does not Jüngel's characterisation of the aesthetic experience as the unity between forcefulness and freedom precisely *avoid* this mistake? What is obviously lacking in his theology of the Word is a hermeneutical reflection on how the experience of a successful 'narrative metaphor' really brings about transformation, how it can change the codes of an existing culture, how it really introduces into a new perspective upon the world, namely a Christian understanding of reality. To be sure, the *Sitz im Leben* of the word or language event in *God as the mystery of the world* is the proclamation of the Gospel, and the Church service *itself* is not the place in which Christian cultural work is carried out. Rather, the latter would lead back to the questions discussed in part II. However, it is the place which is supposed to *initiate* into Christian cultural work on the most general level, in the sense that that which is 'hermeneutically' common to all Christian acts of interpretation must be appropriated and internalised. What is needed is a conception of faith which, right from the beginning, entails a creative human response to the divine address. To put this differently, the ideal of passive reception is only left behind if the newly acquired or deepened faith leads to, or rather *is*, a new way of life and a new way of interpreting the world.

It follows from this that even if the focus is exclusively on Church proclamation – and not on the cultural work to which it is supposed to give rise – the *active reception* of the divine Word must be paid greater attention to. This is not at all to deny the usefulness of the distinction between 'showing' and 'saying' (in Wittgenstein's sense), nor to reject the idea that the experience of metaphor/parable and non-verbal art forms fall into the former, rather than the latter category. Hence the following considerations should be read as an elaboration of the above account of metaphor and aesthetics. First, I shall elucidate the concept of active reception in connection with the idea of the 'open work'. This will, secondly, lead to a reflection on the unlimited fullness or inexhaustive depth of meaning in a work of art, to which only an explicitly *diachronic* interpretative practice can do justice. Thirdly, I shall try to show that this continual interpretative effort must change the interpreter in the sense that he

[55] N. Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 159-164, 170ff.

acquires a new interpretative *habitus*. These three points will be elaborated on in chapter two.

Active reception

In a chapter called the *Poetics of the Open Work*, Eco considers the active participation of the performer/addressee in the act of interpreting works of art and the 'openness' of the work of art itself. The time between the Baroque era and modern Symbolist poetics reveals an ever-increasing sensibility for the fact that a work of art is susceptible to various interpretations. Eco's analysis is based on specific modern artists such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Stéphane Mallarmé or James Joyce, whose artistic styles deviate considerably from 'classical' art in the sense that more room is given to indetermination and openness. Their artistic products remained literally speaking 'unfinished'. Yet the following reflections do not address questions related to a particular period in the history of art but are rather concerned with the interpretation of works of art in general. In other words, what Eco calls the 'open work', is taken to be an *extreme* case of all artistic production.

Mallarmé says that "nommer un objet c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la juissance du poème, qui est fait du bonheur de devenir peu à peu …".[56] Consequently, during the receptive process, the interpreter has to refrain from imposing upon the work a single sense, for this would problematically reduce the infinite suggestive possibilities represented by the work of art. Referring to an 'open' musical composition Eco makes the following remarks:[57]

> Every performance *explains* but does not *exhaust* it [i.e. the work of art]. Every performance makes the work an actuality, but is itself only complementary to all possible other performances of the work. In short, we can say that every performance offers us a complete and satisfying version of the work, but at the same time makes it incomplete for us, because it cannot simultaneously give all the other artistic solutions which the work may admit.

Yet Eco does not embrace the radical view that the pre-understanding completely swallows up the work of art, as Stanley Fish seems to suggest. According to the Italian semiotician, even an 'open' work of art always constitutes a network of interpretative constraints which limit the possible interpretative moves of the performer or interpreter. On the one hand, there is room for a wide variety of different creative interventions on the part of the interpreter, on the other hand this invitation to complete the 'open work' does not allow for arbitrariness and amorphous participation.

The appropriateness of the interpretation can be inter-subjectively controlled, but – given that what is at stake here is a genre of 'text' which introduces into a particular interpretative perspective on the world – the process of assessing an interpretation is of utmost complexity. For the term 'appropriate interpretation' here comes to mean *appropriate way of life*. These considerations lead to anthropological issues such as how the appropriated work of art shapes the interpreter and his behaviour in the world. I shall address some of these questions below. First, however, it needs to be defined what genre of 'text' it is that possesses the hermeneutical potential to intro-

[56] Quoted in U. Eco, *Das offene Kunstwerk*, 37.
[57] Ibid., 49.

duce into a particular perspective on the world. Following Eco, I shall give a brief outline of his conception of the *aesthetic text*.[58]

Creative ambiguity

The aesthetic text is *ambiguous* since it violates the rules of the code. But not all deviations from the norm, be they phonetic, lexical, syntactical, semantic or stylistic, produce an aesthetic effect. For instance, the Latin expression /*Paulum Petrus amat*/ carries a connotation of 'excessive elegance', whereas the phrase /*Amat Paulum Petrus*/ simply sounds odd. Now in the former case, the addressee will not in the first place be interested in the fact that a man with the name Petrus loves another man called Paulus. Rather, he will pay attention to the *aesthetic surplus* the expression may entail. Semiotically speaking, such nuances can be explained in terms of stylistic sub-codes, which are cases of over-coding. The ambiguity of an aesthetic text is crucial to the aesthetic experience. It is never just an arbitrary deviation from the norm causing pure disorder, but rather focuses the attention of the addressee, motivates him to make an extraordinary interpretative effort and suggests ways of decoding the text.

The significance of the continuum

In the aesthetic sign-vehicle, matter plays a crucial role and becomes semiotically relevant to the sign-function. For instance, in everyday language, the alteration of the pronunciation, stress or intonation of a word is normally of no significance whatsoever. What matters is only whether the absolute phonological identity of a phoneme can be recognised or not, i.e. there are no degrees of similarity, as with phonetic identity. By contrast, in aesthetic discourse, every variation in stress, intonation, etc., can be of utmost importance. In other words, even those features which pertain to the continuum (matter, stuff) and which need not normally be taken into consideration for a semiotic approach here become semiotically meaningful. "In the aesthetic text, the matter of *the sign-vehicle becomes an aspect of the expression-form*".[59]

Eco gives another, non-linguistic example. In order to recognise a cross *as a* cross, it is enough to cross two sticks of any material, size and colour. In order to create a cross for the royal treasury of a medieval king however, only a select range of materials such as gold and precious stones was considered suitable. And not just the material mattered, also size, weight, transparency and so on formed part of the aesthetic value of the object. On the one hand, gold and jewels played such an important role since they could be manipulated according to the design of the craftsman. On the other hand, these materials were *themselves* carriers of cultural signification and could hence not be replaced arbitrarily.

[58] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotic*, 261-276. I shall confine myself to those features which are particularly relevant for this essay.
[59] Ibid., 266.

Aesthetic over-coding: expression and content

The aesthetic experience can be semiotically conceived of in terms of an ongoing and in principle infinite process of *over-coding*. That is to say, a pre-established code is refined by introducing sub-codes which in turn can be divided into further sub-codes *ad infinitum*. More precisely, there is "a strong relation between the further segmentation of the token matter of a given sign-vehicle and the *further segmentation of the expression plane* of an entire semiotic system".[60] In other words, since semiotic analysis proceeds by segmenting the continuum in ever more subtle ways, it continually increases our understanding of it.

A more complex organisation within an expression-continuum also leads to an increase of complexity within the content-continuum. Looking at a piece of art, the addressee faces a twofold challenge. On the one hand he presumes that there is a surplus of expression in the artistic text that he may not be able to analyse satisfactorily. On the other hand the surplus on the expression plane, though not exhaustively grasped, gives him a vague feeling of a surplus of content as well.

The aesthetic text and code-changing

The contemplation of a work of art requires an extraordinary interpretative effort of the addressee. But at the same time, the hypothetical tension that is build up by exploring the various possible interpretations, elicits strong and complex feelings such as pleasure, enjoyment, excitement, fulfilment, etc. Yet Eco rejects all attempts at reducing aesthetic experience to the emotive level and emphasises that art does have a *cognitive* dimension as well; that is, it also produces further *knowledge*. As soon as the addressee commences his interpretative labour, the artistic text forces him to reconsider the prevailing codes and their possibilities. "Every text threatens the codes but at the same time gives them strength; it reveals unsuspected possibilities in them, and thus changes the attitude of the user toward them".[61]

While contemplating a work of art, new semiotic possibilities are opened up which compel the addressee to rethink the whole linguistic practice bequeathed to him, shedding a new light on past, present and possible future utterances. The aesthetic experience is an invitation to challenge and re-structure the prevailing organisation of the content that may lead to a modification and renewal of the whole semantic system. "But to change semantic systems means *to change the way in which culture 'sees' the world*".[62]

Every interpretation of a work of art is *definitive* in the sense that it is for the interpreter *the work itself* and not just an aspect or part of it. Yet at the same time every interpretation is *provisional* insofar as the interpreter must be aware that the produced interpretation falls short of grasping the fullness of meanings entailed in the

[60] Ibid., 268. By 'token matter', Eco means the following: a sign-function consists of a correlation between an abstract element of the expression system and an abstract element of the content system. Hence a code is to be seen as a general *type* which establishes the rules generating concrete *tokens*, i.e. the signs used in discourse. Now the 'token matter' of a sign-vehicle denotes the matter of which a concrete sign is made of.
[61] Ibid., 274.
[62] Ibid.

work of art. It thus becomes clear that he has to *deepen* his understanding of the work.[63] On this view, the individual acts of interpretation should not be seen as a series of unconnected punctual events but rather form a directed serialisation which lead to an ever deeper understanding of the work. And the anthropological correlate of this process of interpretation is the transformation of the interpreter. These questions will be discussed in the following sub-chapters.

'Inexhaustive' depth of meaning and 'diachrony'

It follows from this that the immediacy which is characteristic of the experience of parable and works of art cannot be played off against a prolonged, 'diachronic' effort to understand them. Quite the reverse: the true lover of art *lives* with Bach's fugues, Dostoyevsky's novels and Tarkovsky's films. To be sure, each time an interpreter exposes himself to these works of art, he indeed experiences an immediate affection, which few would ascribe, for instance, to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Yet only by a continual interpretative effort, real familiarity with a work can be achieved. This is not to deny that the concentration and attentiveness required to 'read' a work of art differs significantly from that of reading a philosophical text. Thus without questioning the usefulness of the hermeneutical distinction between 'showing' and 'saying', the *diachronic* dimension of the interpretative endeavour is to be emphasised.

This does not exclude the possibility that even a genuinely great work of art, which the interpreter pays utmost attention to, after a while fails to stimulate his intellect and imagination. His senses are so accustomed to it that it looses its surprising, challenging effect and no longer re-organises the interpreter's interpretative schemes by means of which he sees the world. Its form is temporarily exhausted and a certain saturation point is reached so that "the enjoyment we now draw out of it [i.e. of a piece of music] is merely the memory of the pleasure we once felt while listening to it".[64] As Eco suggests, in order to make it reverberate again, it needs to be put in quarantine for some time. This gives the interpreter's sensibility time to rejuvenate and allows us to perceive a work again in its original vividness and surprising originality. The life experience gained in the meantime enables him to see hitherto ignored aspects of the work, which not necessarily contradict but rather supplement earlier perceptions. This reopens a new refreshing dialogue with the work and constitutes the beginning of a personal *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

In the next section I shall examine how this diachronic practice of interpretation can change the interpreter.

Interpretative habit(us)

Jüngel, following the later Heidegger, places the stress on the relationship between *being and language*, but to a certain extent neglects the close connection, analysed e.g. by Wittgenstein, Peirce and others, between language/meaning/interpretation and *action* or (interpretative) *habit(us)*. As Ricœur succinctly points out, Heidegger de-

[63] Cf. L. Pareyson, *Estetica*, 194ff., quoted in U. Eco, *Das offene Kunstwerk*, 58.
[64] U. Eco, *Das offene Kunstwerk*, 82.

veloped an "*ontology without ethics*".[65] However, if this anthropological dimension of interpretative processes is taken seriously, the appropriation and internalisation of the text, the inculcation of the addressee with a new understanding of God, self and world cannot be neglected. This of course raises the question of which type(s) of communication are most suitable to fulfil this task. It thus becomes at least questionable why *address* or *language event*, as conceived by Jüngel and other proponents of the Hermeneutical Theology, should be considered the *mode of discourse par excellence* in this respect. If the main aim is the acquisition of a new interpretative habit on the part of the addressee, other forms of communication may be preferable. Once again, what is at stake here is an interpretative habit(us) that is common to all interpreters which inhabit the same perspective on the world – as opposed to differentiation, which was the main concern in the preceding part.

From the perspective taken in this essay, the idea of (interpretative) habit(us), or disposition is central because it constitutes the link between (the internalisation of) the basic 'texts' of the Christian community and Christian cultural work. At least a theology which conceives of faith right from the beginning in terms of 'enacted charity' cannot dispense with this thought-category.

Moreover, it is worth noticing that twentieth century philosophy's rediscovery of the importance or even indispensability of the concept of habit(us) is by no means exclusively motivated by ethical or moral interests – as e.g. in the case of Alasdair MacIntyre. As we have seen in the first part, Peirce, as a semiotician, was primarily interested in the question of meaning, but came to the conclusion that what he called the 'ultimate logical interpretant' must be viewed as a "habit of conduct" (*CP* 5.504). Likewise, Merleau-Ponty, reflecting on the relationship between the visible and the invisible, sees the human body as *flesh*, "a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle …".[66] In an earlier work, he talks about the self-movement of the human body, which he interprets in terms of auto-production of schemes which give our life "the form of generality and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions".[67] Finally, the concept of *habitus* is one of the central tools in the work of the great social scientist Pierre Bourdieu.[68]

As particularly the last reference reveals, to highlight the importance of *habitus* does not mean to deny the trans-subjective character of faith. It is rather Jüngel's theology of the Word which fails to account for how the power of the Word can really transcend the individual believer and penetrate all levels of human society and culture. But "without Christian culture […] there is only a nominal, not a mediated grace, which must remain uncomprehended and without real effect".[69] To put it crudely, the point of the parable is like a spark which lights up for a split second, but then goes out again without having kindled a fire or fanned an already burning fire.[70]

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[65] P. Ricœur, *On Life Stories*, 167,
[66] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 184.
[67] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénonénologie de la perception*, 171.
[68] P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72-95.
[69] J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 13.
[70] Ironically, Jüngel's hermeneutics of the parable seems almost to *encourage* the reaction of "the one who hears the word and immediately (*εὐθὺς*) receives it with joy (*μετὰ χαρᾶς*)" (Mat 13:20). Every-

Even if Jüngel insists that in the point of the parable freedom and forcefulness coincide, the pendulum clearly swings toward a passive reception – even if this passivity is less extreme than in Barth's *Prolegomena*.

The above reflections on the middle voice and active reception are inseparably linked up with theological questions and lead directly to the discussion about *nature* and *grace*.

e) *Esse* and *Venire*: nature and grace, activity and passivity

Activity and Passivity

According to Jüngel, in the point of the parable, the kingdom of God is closer to the hearer than he is to himself. However, Jüngel reinterprets the Augustinian *tu autem eras interior intimo meo* by substituting *venire* for *esse*. In his view, a proper understanding of the Gospel as analogy excludes the notion of divine presence in terms of an always already being-present of the creative ground in being. Rather, it is to be conceived as a dynamic *event*, an arrival of God in the sense of a divine self-communication.[71]

Once more actualistic thought-categories prevail. Why, one wonders, can divine presence not assume the form of 'esse' *and* 'venire'? Put differently, is it not theologically and hermeneutically *desirable* to conceive of God's presence in both modes? As is most evident in *KD* § 27, the notion of a total discontinuity between old and new creation amounts to the (unintelligible) view that that which mediates linguistically between 'old' and 'new' is strictly speaking only a sign-vehicle with two completely different meanings (or two different semantic fields), which remain utterly unrelated. This inevitably follows from Barth's statement that the pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) of a term is completely irrelevant to grasp its revelatory meaning (*KD* II/1, 260). Jüngel clearly rejects this view on various levels. First, as outlined in part II, he embarks on a lengthy discussion of the meaning of the term love in its pre-theological usage(s), which he considers a prerequisite in order to understand the meaning of divine *agapē*.[72] Secondly, he points out that the innovative character of metaphor and parable depends on the interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar.[73] But does this view not imply God's presence as *esse* (pre-understanding) *and* as *venire* (Christological transformation of the pre-understanding)?

In an essay explicitly dedicated to this question, Jüngel strongly stresses that there is *radical discontinuity* between the theologically 'new' and its relationship with the

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body who listens to the parable like a 'joke', may well be able to grasp its point – unlike the one who hears "the word of the kingdom and does not understand it" (13:19) – but he nonetheless has *not* understood properly. For "such a person has no root, but endures only for a while (πρόσκαιρός), and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away" (13:21). This is the Lord's commentary on the seeds which fell on rocky ground, "where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil" (13:5). Any hermeneutics of parable must pay attention to the act of reception and that which is effected by its reception.

[71] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 404, fn 26.

[72] Ibid., 430ff.

[73] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 130.

'old'. Not only can the 'new' not be extrapolated from the old, the old needs to be *annhihilated* to make room for the new.[74] The old retains its significance only as 'language material', as analogate, type and parable for the new – as we have seen. It is only at the very end of his essay that Jüngel briefly suggests refining his view of the old as an *antithetical concept* to the new, by pointing out that the old is not necessarily hopeless, "for it also belongs to the *good order of creation*".[75] Yet this line of thought is not dominant in Jüngel's work. It thus comes as no surprise that there are further dualistic tendencies in his thought. In an important essay on secularism, written in 1972, he operates with an ontological dichotomy, distinguishing between the realisation of the eschatological essence of the world in the Church and the world *extra ecclesiam* which is non-essential. The 'old' world *fades away* in the light of the 'new' world, rather than being transformed and completed by it.[76] As Stoellger remarks: "Vermieden werden *muss* […] *der hier die Eschatologie dominierende Dualismus*, der das Alte der Vernichtung überlässt, statt es der Verwandlung zuzuführen".[77]

These questions are related to the perennial theological debate about the relationship between *nature* and *grace*. If *nature is emphasised at the expense of grace*, there is the danger of immanentism, which often manifests itself in an uncritical evangelical sanctioning – rather than sanctification – of the present culture. The power of the Gospel is stripped of its specifically Christian content and no longer challenges and transforms a particular order but rather bestows on it (additional) legitimacy and authority, which is often problematically resorted to in case of conflict. This type of theology is emphatically rejected by Barth and Jüngel alike. Barth's liberal Protestant predecessors adhered to positions of this kind. If *grace is emphasised at the expense of nature*, the result is a kind of actualism, a dualism between 'old' and 'new' creation, which comes close to Gnosticism. One of the characteristic features of this type of theology is the idea of passive reception of grace on the part of the human addressee (as in Barth's *Prolegomena*), or at least the relative neglect of the human response (as in Jüngel's work).

Both of these positions are one-sided and problematic. Christian theology has to reject any nature-grace dualism and confess that nature is always already graced but also in need of completion and restoration. Consequently, the fundamental theological distinction is that between sin and holiness, which by no means coincides with that of nature and grace. *Ontologically speaking*, nature is that which is always already directed towards its fulfilment by grace and therefore cannot be separated from grace in any way. From this ontological perspective, nature is strictly speaking itself nothing other than a manifestation of God's grace so that it is more appropriate to distinguish between different modes of divine grace, rather than between nature and grace. As a further consequence, it is no longer tenable to associate grace exclusively with the 'new' (and nature with the 'old') – even if these terms are used in an es-

[74] E. Jüngel, *Das Entstehen von Neuem*, 140.
[75] Ibid., 149f.
[76] E. Jüngel, *Säkularisierung*, No 32f.
[77] P. Stoellger, *Metapher und Lebenswelt*, 441.

chatological fashion. I shall elaborate on these remarks below. *Pragmatically speaking*, the term nature denotes *the present state of creation*, which comprises *both* sin and holiness, and grace is the divine presence which fulfils (or re-establishes) creation (*as* creation) by annihilating the sinful. From this perspective, grace is primarily associated with the 'new', because it is experienced as that power, which distinguishes between sin and holiness and overcomes the former in a transformative process *that takes time*. Thus grace is perceived as the *arrival* of the *new*.

I shall now give an example of how the rejection of a (crude) nature-grace distinction is related to a middle-voiced approach which goes beyond an active-passive dichotomy in the sense that God acts and human beings passively receive.

Maximus the Confessor, reflecting upon the Aristotelian question of 'being as being', differentiates between three different ontological modes, which can also be construed in terms of three different modes of *grace*. These three modes are "being" (*τὸ εἶναι*), "well-being" (*τὸ εὖ εἶναι*) and "eternal (well-)being" (*τὸ ἀεὶ (εὖ) εἶναι*). 'Being' is given by God to everything that exists and constitutes the essence of every created being right from the beginning of its existence. It is the natural principle of a creature's movement and encompasses its capacities and faculties independent of their directedness. Yet without free will and free choice it cannot possess in fullness the activity and operation toward which these capacities and faculties naturally tend.[78]

Whereas God is the sole origin of a creature's 'being', 'well-being' is conditional on the positive qualification of its powers and capacities, i.e. on their orientation towards the good, which is God himself. 'Being' corresponds to the natural logos of a created being and 'well-being' to its mode of existence, and the latter can only be realised if the mode of existence conforms to the natural logos. If the powers and faculties are used against the natural logos, and if a creature strives for something else than its divinely instituted *telos*, it is in a state of 'bad-being' (*φεῦ εἶναι*). Furthermore, 'being' corresponds to the inalienable 'image of God' in man, 'well-being' to the 'likeness of God' which must be seen as an actualisation of man's powers and capacities by acquisition of virtues.[79]

Finally, like 'being', 'eternal (well-)being' can only be accomplished by God alone, because a finite creature cannot become its own end.[80] But even if 'eternal (well-)being' does not result from human effort, the mode of 'well-being' is its precondition. On the one hand, this process of divinisation leads 'beyond nature'[81] in the sense that nature does neither posses the capacity or power, nor the energy to reach this state. Rather, 'eternal (well-)being' or divinisation is only achieved if the operations of all the powers of man's nature are renounced, if he forgoes all natural movement in order to abandon himself ecstatically to God's will and his energies by which he is taken charge of. "Face à Dieu qui accomplit *activement*, par Son énergie, sa divinisation, l'homme est donc *passif*".[82] On the other hand, this 'passivity' does

[78] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 10 (MPG 91, 1116B).
[79] J.-C. Larchet, *St Maxime le Confesseur*, 148.
[80] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 10 (MPG 91, 1116B).
[81] Here nature is used in the 'pragmatic' sense.
[82] J.-C. Larchet, *St Maxime le Confesseur*, 186. Italics mine.

not entail an abolishment of human faculties, but rather requires a human being's *active* consent that these faculties may be used as receptacles and instruments for God's energies. Human energy and operation is not suppressed but radically re-directed toward God in order to become worthy and receptive to him, who is alone capable to bring about divinisation. Freedom is thus by no means denied. Rather, a human being's voluntary renouncement of its natural operations, which pave the way for divine operation, "correspond à sa volonté la plus profonde, à son choix, et à ce à quoi il tend de tout son être".[83] Accordingly, deification only constitutes a change as regards man's "mode of existence" (*τρόπος ὑπάρξεως*) but in no way alters his "natural principle" (*λόγος φύσεως*), which clearly indicates that *nature* (here used in the strictly *theological* sense) is right from the beginning, first, always already shot through with grace, and secondly, primordially designed to find its completion and fulfilment in a perpetual progress and striving toward God.[84] Thus what is required is a "willing surrender" (*ἐκχώρησις γνωμική*)[85], "a complete handing-over of our self-determination to God; and this is not its destruction but its perfect fulfilment according to the capacity of its nature".[86]

It will now be shown how the differentiation between these three 'modes of grace' is connected with the middle voice and the question of active/passive reception. The following investigation is based on two key terms in Maximus' thought as regards the interrelationship between divine and human action: (divine) *activity*, *energy* or *operation* (*ἐνέργεια*), and (human) *comportment* or *habitus* (*ἕξις*).[87] The concepts *ἐνέργεια* and *ἕξις* fall into the sphere of what Greek philosophy called *μεταξύ*, the realm 'between' God and creation. In order to analyse the encounter between God and man, which leads to deification, both *ἐνέργεια* and *ἕξις* need to be taken into account. On the level of the second 'ontological mode', *ἕξις* constitutes the realisation of a specific human possibility according to his nature, which qualifies his 'being' as 'well-being' and which is manifest in virtuous living. On this plane, *ἕξις* is closely connected with the exercise and formation of the human "faculty of judging" (*γνώμη*) and therefore related to ascetic struggle and *praxis* (*πρᾶξις*).[88]

On the level of 'eternal (well-)being' and divinisation, divine *ἐνέργεια* actualises the union with God toward which 'being as being' naturally tends, and *ἕξις* constitutes the human condition of this process.[89]

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[83] Ibid., 187.

[84] This is not to say that Maximus does not know the term "super-natural" (*ὑπὲρ φύσιν*), which he uses occasionally, cf. *Ad Thalassium* 60 (MPG 90, 621C-D). Nonetheless, on an ontological level, there cannot be a difference between nature and grace or philosophy and theology according to the Confessor. Cf. H.-U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, 121.

[85] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7 (MPG 91, 1076B).

[86] P. Sherwood, *St. Maximus the Confessor*, 59.

[87] See the excellent study which revolves around these two terms: P. Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*.

[88] Ibid., 271-292. The translation of *γνώμη* as "faculty of judging" is taken from Renczes, ibid., 282.

[89] Maximus Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 6 (MPG 90, 281A-B). On the basis of the above exposition of the relationship between "natural principle" (*λόγος φύσεως*) and "mode of existence" (*τρόπος ὑπάρξεως*), it is clear that divinisation does not mean *de*-humanisation. Rather, as Grillmeier puts it: "*Je mehr der Mensch Gott geeint wird, desto mehr wird er selber Mensch*", A. Grillmeier, *Die Wirkung des Heilshandelns Gottes in Christus*, 382.

With those undergoing the birth, the Holy Spirit takes the whole of their free choice and translates it completely from earth to heaven, and through the true knowledge acquired by divine energy (*κατ' ἐνέργειαν*), transfigures the mind with the blessed light-rays of our God and Father, such that the mind is deemed another god, insofar as in its habitude (*κατὰ τὴν ἕξιν*) it experiences, by grace that which God himself does not experience but is in his very essence.

Divinisation is exclusively initiated by the divine *ἐνέργεια*, which alone can transform a human being and is in no way just an actualisation of an inherent human capacity.[90] It is due to God's free gift of grace based on Incarnation and redemption through Christ in the Holy Spirit.[91] Yet an analysis of the complex interrelationship between *ἐνέργεια* and *ἕξις* shows clearly that there is no simple dichotomy between divine action and human passivity; precisely because there is no simple nature-grace distinction. On the one hand, *ἕξις* must be understood as the *capacity to receive* the gifts of the Holy Spirit, although it is of course *itself a gift of grace*.[92] That is to say, *grace* is needed to receive *grace*, which again amounts to a distinction between different modes of grace.[93] On the other hand, *ἕξις* is needed to actively *preserve* and *nurture* the gifts received by the Spirit.[94] But *ἕξις* is neither just the capacity bestowed upon the believer by God to receive spiritual gifts, nor simply that which enables him to preserve these gifts, but itself something that must be 'energised' and 'actualised' in order to perform certain divinely instituted acts.[95] It follows from this that the precondition for the reception of the gift is a certain *preparedness* and *attunement*, and that the gift is only properly received if it is itself 'enacted' by the recipient, i.e. if it is used to advance the union with God.

Maximus' conception of the relationship between divine action and human response is much closer to Eberhard's reflections on the middle voice and Christian theology than Jüngel's still too actualistic 'theology of the advent'. What Eberhard says about Gadamer's *theological* thinking, which flies in the face of his extraordinary and ground-breaking insights in *philosophical* hermeneutics, equally applies to Jüngel – in spite of the latter's attempt to keep a balance between 'freedom' and 'forcefulness'. Eberhard writes: "The way Gadamer describes Christian faith, particularly in its Protestant form, answers the conundrum of the division of labor between God and humans by making God active and putting humans at the passive, receiving end".[96] On the other hand, a middle-voiced approach which overcomes the subject/object and active/passive mode of thinking does by no means lead to an understanding of faith which *excludes* the subject. "The middle voice does not outright cancel the distinction between the giving and the receiving end as far as faith is con-

[90] It is therefore not to be confused with an Aristotelian *ἐντελέχεια*, P. Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*, 150-154, 322f.
[91] Ibid., 329-349.
[92] Maximus Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 59 (MPG 90, 605B).
[93] However, the starting point of this process is not the 'natural grace' which remained after the fall. That which enables human beings to respond, is the new birth received in the sacrament of baptism. Yet the baptismal grace entails two dimensions. First, the grace of adoption is bestowed upon the believer, which is fully present in *potency*. Secondly, baptism commences the *actualisation* of that grace which must grow and develop through the believer's active co-operation with divine grace, *Ad Thalassium* 6 (MPG 90, 280C-281B).
[94] Ibid., 63 (MPG 90, 676A-C).
[95] Ibid., 29 (MPG 90, 365A-B).
[96] P. Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 204.

cerned, *but it shifts the attention from faith as an object to faith as a process*".[97] In other words, "[f]aith, like art and marriage […] are things we engage in and that engage our whole being".[98]

Every experience of grace and its subsequent 'enacting' response, though genuinely new and entirely *without* human capability, is nothing other than the actualisation and realisation of man's *logos*. Maximus talks about the return (*ἐπάνοδος*) of the believers "to the principle according to the end" (*πρὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν κατὰ τὸ τέλος*), and this return is at the same time the fulfilment (*πλήρωσίς*) of their desire.[99] However, a circular or anti-finalist reading of this passage would be inappropriate, for the end of man (*τέλος*) and his principle (*ἀρχὴ*) *only* coincide with regard to "the ultimate divine *goal* of creation".[100] In order to understand this, it is helpful to keep in mind that in Maximus, the pre-lapsarian state is considered a *potency* rather than a actuality, since the fall is thought of as practically *instantaneous* with creation (*ἅμα τῷ γενέσθαι*).[101] It follows from this that the *ἀρχὴ κατὰ τὸ τέλος* is the principle according to which Adam was supposed to live, but failed to adhere to. Yet life in accordance with his principle would have been a *dynamical* movement towards God, from which he deviated, rather than a 'state' in the literal, 'static' sense. Thus in 'equating' the end with the principle, Maximus only says that deification, i.e. the realisation of man's ultimate end, is nothing other than the accomplishment of God's original plan for man. And not only the principle, also the *goal* is not simply a 'state', but rather, as Maximus puts it paradoxically, an "ever-moving repose" (*ἀεικίνητος στάσις*).[102] The return to the *principle* is thus the return to an *infinite progress* in the love and knowledge of God and creation, from which Adam deviated. And it is this infinite progress which at the same time constitutes the ultimate *goal* of man.

This emphasis on a free, active and therefore also 'creative' response to the experience of divine grace leads back to the above reflections on *the open work*. As John Milbank reminds us, there is indeed an "analogy between *grace* and *art*".[103] It is worth noticing in this respect that the pre-Christian use of the word grace (*χάρις*) in Greek antiquity comprises the meaning of a grace, kindness or goodwill done by an *agent* or *doer*, as well as the sense of favour, thankfulness and gratitude expressed by the *receiver*.[104] The notion of grace as art, or grace as beauty, highlights the fact that the beautiful and concomitantly grace can only be known in and through an appropriate *response*. It is thus able to cross the boundaries between nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural, and the immanent and the transcendent.[105]

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[97] Ibid., 206. Italics mine.
[98] Ibid., 212.
[99] Maximus Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 59 (MPG 90, 608D); see P. Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*, 150-154.
[100] P. Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*, 152.
[101] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 42 (MPG 91, 1321B).
[102] Ibid., 67 (MPG 91, 1401A).
[103] J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 53.
[104] H. Liddell/R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1978f.
[105] D. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 20. Hart draws on H.-U. von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol. I, 34.

Constitution

From a theological perspective, it is clear that a middle-voiced approach is inconceivable without the idea of an always already 'graced nature'. But this is not to deny that nature is in need of redemption. As we have seen in Maximus, God's intervention always precedes any human action; a fact which is grounded in the *extra nos* character of the Christ event. It would be wrong to believe that Maximus pays more attention to the anthropological appropriation of grace than to its Christological basis. In fact his theology is consistently Christocentric. Jean-Claude Larchet, in his major study of deification in Maximus, dedicates three chapters to the Christological foundation of *theosis*: (i) *Salvation as precondition of deification*. (ii) *The mode of divinisation of the human nature of Christ.* (iii) *The relationship between divinisation of the human nature of Christ and the divinisation of human beings*.[106]

The appropriation of the benefits of the Christ event in baptism implants in the believer the fully potential grace of adoption and at the same time begins its actualisation.[107] It is worth noticing that Maximus, unusual for a Church father of the Eastern tradition, strongly emphasise the severity of the fall and its consequences. For this reason it has been suggested that there is some Augustinian influence. However, this claim cannot be substantiated and a detailed analysis reveals that Maximus' view of the fall differs significantly from that of Augustine.[108] Nonetheless, Maximus stresses that according to the law which came to rule life after Adam's transgression, *nothing* is exempt from sin (ἀναμάρτητος), and he even goes so far as to use the expression *generic sin* (γενική ἁμαρτία).[109]

Yet, as Larchet points out, despite this, "Maxime ne considère pas que la volonté de l'homme déchu soit totalement mauvaise et impuissante".[110] Although the *totality* of man is affected by the consequences of the fall, postlapsarian man is in a state of weakness rather than total corruption. What ultimately matters is the question of whether there is – at least after the reception of baptismal grace – a point of departure for a theologically meaningful human response. Such a position is still compatible with a hamartiology that emphasises the severity of the fall. Negatively speaking, even if such a point of departure exists, the *distance* between believer and God can still be infinite – infinite with respect to human *sinfulness* and the Christologically mediated divine *holiness* (and not with respect to a dichotomy between time/space and eternity). Positively speaking, this infinite distance between believer and God allows for an infinite *progress* in the love and knowledge of God.[111]

Now according to Barth and Jüngel, the divine constitution of the believer *as a person* is the precondition for any human response to God's call. And it is character-

[106] J.-C. Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, 221-382.
[107] Maximus Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 6 (MPG 90, 280C-281B).
[108] J.-Larchet, *Maxime le Confesseur, médiateur entre l'Orient et l'Occident*, 120-124.
[109] Maximus Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 21 (MPG 90, 312B-313B).
[110] J.-Larchet, *Maxime le Confesseur, médiateur entre l'Orient et l'Occident*, 122.
[111] P. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the concept of "perpetual progress"*, 159ff.

istic of reformational theology in general to emphasise this aspect.[112] Yet the issue of constitution is by no means neglected in pre-reformational thought. As mentioned above, Maximus distinguishes between three modes of being: "being" (*τὸ εἶναι*), "well-being" (*τὸ εὖ εἶναι*) and "eternal (well-)being" (*τὸ ἀεὶ* (*εὖ*) *εἶναι*), which correspond to three different 'births'. First, there is *bodily birth*, i.e. our *coming-into-being* (*γένεσις*), where we are bestowed upon "being". Second, there is our *baptismal birth* which confers upon up us the grace of "well-being". Third, there is the ultimate *birth of resurrection*, through which we attain the grace of "eternal (well-)being"[113] It is the second birth that fulfils the function which Barth and Jüngel call the constitution of the believer as a person, establishing the condition of possibility for an active response. Baptism, the incorporation of a believer into the body of Christ is, like Christ's death and resurrection, a *once-and-for-all* event. Yet it seems that in Barth and Jüngel, the issue of constitution has become the all-dominating concern. On the one hand, it is no longer seen as an event that takes place only once but is in principle infinitely prolonged. On the other hand, divine speech, coupled with the idea of passive reception, comes to a certain extent to *replace* the sacrament of baptism. At least as far as Barth is concerned, the result is a continual re-constitution of the believer. This leads to an impoverishment of the Church life since all aspects of Christian faith related to human response are pushed aside.

Barth distinguishes between baptism *in water* and baptism *in the Holy Spirit*, and the latter undoubtedly leads back to divine speech in the sense that the constitution of the believer as a person coincides with his being *addressed* by God.[114] Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a work of God, and exclusively a work of God. It is that aspect of the divine economy in which the benefits accomplished by Christ, *illic et tunc*, are applied to to the *hic et nunc* of the individual believer (*KD* IV/4, 29f). Baptism in the Holy Spirit is more than reference (*Hinweis*) or indication (*Anzeige*) by means of image and symbol. What cannot be said about human decision and response and baptism with water, does fully pertain to baptism with the Holy Spirit: it is an *effective*, *causative* and *creative* divine action on and in man, which *purifies*, *renews* and *changes* him truly and totally. It is, in the most literal sense, a *sacramental* act that takes place, and its effects must be understood *realistically* and not just significantly and figuratively (*KD* IV/4, 37f).

Although baptism with the Spirit is conceived as a *once-and-for-all* event, which bestows on the believer the *fullness of grace* – to which he can look back gratefully for the rest of his life – it is difficult to see how the baptismal event could be marked off from other, following experiences of divine address (*KD* IV/4, 38). That baptism with the Holy Spirit is mediated by divine speech can hardly be contested given the central role this mode of divine presence plays in Barth's thought throughout the whole *Church Dogmatics*. And since, according to Barth, *every* act of divine revela-

[112] *KD* II/1, 22; *KD* IV/1, 837; E. Jüngel, *Der menschliche Mensch*, 194-213; I.U. Dalferth/E. Jüngel, *Person und Gottebenbildlichkeit*, 70-86, esp. 75f, 85. See also I.U. Dalferth, *Glaube: systematisch-theologisch*, 200f; *Über Einheit und Vielfalt des christlichen Glaubens*, 124f, 126f, 129-131.
[113] Maximus Confessor, *Ambiguum* 42 (MPG 91, 1316A, 1325B).
[114] See *KD* IV/4, 3-44, 45-234; P. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 114, 123.

tion is a full revelation of God's grace and love, there is in principle only the temporal factor that may serve as a criterion to distinguish between the reception of baptismal grace and following *confirmations* of this initiatory sacrament.[115] That is to say, baptism with the Holy Spirit is simply the *first* experience of grace. This does by no means diminish the importance of the baptismal event, since Barth, in line with the reformational tradition, even speaks of the believer's acquisition of a "new being" (*KD* IV/4, 38). It is rather the other way round: it remains unclear as to how the process of transformation *initiated* by baptism (with the Spirit) can be marked off theologically and hermeneutically from baptism itself.

Baptism *with water*, by contrast, even though *it relate*s to the one divine work in Jesus Christ and the one divine Word spoken in him, is not itself a divine work and word; "it is the work and word of *men* who have become obedient to Jesus Christ and who put their hope in him" (*KD* IV/4, 112, italics mine). Baptism with water takes place *in the light of* the baptism of the Spirit and *with a view to* it, but is not itself the baptism of the Spirit; it is an active *recognition of* and *response to* the one mystery and sacrament –
the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – but is not iself a sacrament and mystery. Baptism with water is "not the bearer, means or instrument of grace" (*KD* IV/4, 102).

Interestingly, Barth distinguishes between these two types of baptism, the divine initiative and the human response, in order to *avoid* docetism (*KD* IV/4, 112)! If baptism with the Holy Spirit and baptism with water coincide, he argues, we are faced with the following problem. *Either* the human response to God's preceding action is overshadowed and obscured by an immanent divine action and hence cannot be identified as distinct element in the divine-human encounter. In this case, water baptism is integrated into the baptism with the Spirit and the former is thus rendered superfluous. *Or* baptism with water, i.e. human action, is equated with divine action. In this case, baptism with the Spirit is integrated into the baptism with water and thus renders the the former superfluous (*KD* IV/4, 112).

It is not difficult to see why this distinction is inevitable, given Barth's theological presuppositions. First, since the sacrament of baptism (i.e. baptism with water) can only be administered by a human being and hence too evidently entails *human* action, it cannot mediate *divine* action. Divine and human agency are once again played off against each other. It is inconceivable for Barth that divine presence could be mediated in and through human action – apart from the incarnate Christ himself. Second, the performance of a sacramental act that involves matter and first and foremost concerns a human being *as a body*, runs counter to Barth's declared 'intellectualism' and privileging of phonic signifiers.[116] Baptism with the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly the effect of a sovereign divine speech-act, which is supposed to solve the problem of mediation by keeping human involvement to a 'minimum'. The

[115] „Der Inhalt der Offenbarung ist Gott *ganz* […] Entweder Gott spricht, oder er spricht nicht. Er spricht aber nicht mehr oder weniger, nicht teilweise, nicht in Quanten, hier ein bisschen, dort ein bisschen", K. Barth, *Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion*, 110f.
[116] *KD* I/1, 136f.

model of divine speech is thought to pave the way for an 'immediate' presence of God which bypasses the (alleged) opacity of sign-vehicles other than phonic signifiers. Yet it is questionable whether such a division between baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit is theologically and hermeneutically desirable as regards the question of the constitution of the believer as a person.

a) Hermeneutically speaking, baptism, the incorporation into the body of Christ, is the introduction into the Christian life-world that consists of a whole network of communication. And this introduction into a way of 'being-in-the-world', which is *pre*theoretical and *pre*cognitive, and which founds all acts of cognition and conscious communication, clearly does entail *passivity*. There is always a blind spot that makes it impossible to conceptualise a particular mode of existence as a whole. This 'being-in-the-world' hermeneutically precedes the sending and receiving of individual messages and is always already implied in all acts of communication. According to this model, the constitution of the believer as a person coincides with his entry into the Christian community. Accordingly, the practice of infant baptism, provided it is accompanied by Christian socialisation, makes clear that God's grace is indeed a pure gift that reaches us long before we are able to consciously grasp it, let alone respond to it. Baptism thus precedes (theologically and hermeneutically, though not necessarily temporally) any experiences of evidence – which Barth construes in terms of 'being-addressed-by-God'. In actual fact, baptism, understood as the initiatory sacrament which introduces into the Christian life-world, is the *condition of possibility* of such experiences of evidence. That is to say, without minimal familiarity with the Christian 'way of life' from the internal perspective of the believers, they cannot occur.

Accordingly, there is no need to divide baptism into a passive (baptism with the Holy Spirit: divine action) and an active aspect (baptism with water: human response). The constitution of the believer is not achieved by means of *a* divine address which is conceived of by analogy with (or on the basis of) *a* human speech act. Rather, it is brought about by his entry into a whole network of communication in which the perspectives of senders, addressees and uninvolved bystanders are mutually intertwined. Grammatically speaking, this network of communication corresponds to the system of personal pronouns ('I', 'you', 'he/she', etc.). The competent interlocutor who has mastery of this communicative practice knows how to adopt the prespectives of the first, second and third person, etc., and how they can be transformed into each other.[117]

To be sure, the introduction into the Christian life-world through baptism is inconceivable without human speech. But it is not the speech-acts performed by the minister or priest at the administration of the sacrament of baptism, consciously received by the one who is baptised, which leads to his constitution as a person. For in the case of infant baptism, no such conscious reception takes place at all. Strictly speaking, the incorporation into the body of Christ, the introduction into the Christian life-world, cannot be thought of as a punctual event. One does not enter a (new)

[117] J. Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, 346f.

life-world as one enters a room occupying physical space; i.e. one does never inhabit it either *fully* or *not at all*. Rather, one's life is always *more or less* moulded by a particular life-world. Furthermore, life-worlds, as Abel's *internal pluralism* suggests, do not exist in isolation, but are interconnected. Yet despite this, the introduction into the Christian life-world can and must be symbolically and ritually represented by the initiatory sacrament of baptism which coincides with the constitution of the believer as a person.

The term 'symbolical' does not exclude here the notion of *real presence*. Quite the reverse: it is Barth who reduces baptism with water to a human response that (merely) witnesses to divine interventions which *preceded* this response. On the one hand baptism with water refers back to baptism with the Holy Spirit, the *hic et nunc* application and actualisation of the benefits accomplished by Christ. On the other hand it refers back to the *illic et tunc* of the Christ-event itself. In the above approach, however, the sacrament of baptism does introduce into divine real presence, for God is present *in* the life-world which underlies and shapes all acts of communication performed by Christians. Accordingly, God can be experienced *in* the acts of communication themselves.[118]

b) The inhabiting of a life-world is related to the *bodiliness* of human existence. Every event that happens to my body (*Leib*), happens to *me*, and is henceforth part of my life (story). My body is not only *object*, i.e. something I *have*, but also *subject*, something I *am*; it is something which *defines* me as a human being. "Nulle expérience de soi ne peut mettre le corps entre parenthèses, et mettre alors entre parenthèses les relations de proximité dans lesquelles le corps nous engage; l'expérience de soi est coexpérience du lieu autant qu'elle est coexpérience du temps".[119] When we look at the world, for instance, we do not see things which are first self-identical and then, secondly, offer themselves to our view; nor are we first empty viewers who then open ourselves to the things in the world. Rather, there seems to be something like a "pre-established harmony" between the look and the visible things; it is as if "it knew them before knowing them …".[120] The same holds for tactile experiences. There is a 'kinship' between the touching and the touched.

This affinity is due to the fact that my hand can be felt from *within* as well as from *without*. When my right hand touches my left hand which is palpating things, for instance, the 'touching subject' turns into the 'touched' object, i.e. it becomes itself tangible and thus belongs to the things it touches: *it becomes one of them*. Similarly, he who sees can only possess the visible if he is also possessed by it, if "he *is of it*".[121]

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[118] However, this model needs to be qualified further. In order to avoid any kind of *immanentist communitarianism*, God must be thought of as the one who keeps the interpretative process going. God is at once immanent *and* transcendent in the sense that his presence is manifest in the transition from the interpretation of x as y_n to x as y_{n+1}. This is implied in the biblical imagery of Christ as the head of his body – the Church: Christ on the one hand *is* the Church but at the same time remains *transcendent to* it (cf. Eph 4:15f; Col 1:18; 2:10.19).

[119] J.-Y. Lacoste, *Expérience et Absolu*, 9.

[120] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 175.

[121] Ibid., 177f.

In order to express this double aspect Merleau-Ponty uses the term *flesh* (*la chair*), which is neither matter, nor mind nor substance, but denotes the body insofar as it allows for an equivalence of *sensibility* and *sensible thing*: "[T]he body sensed and the body sentinent are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is just one sole movement in its two phases".[122] On the one hand, since the sensed body is *part* of the sensible world, everything we say about the former also pertains to the latter. On the other hand, the body *incorporates* into itself the whole of the sensible. Thus the view according to which the body is *in* the world and the seer *in* the body as in a box is not tenable. Nor is it possible to hold that the world and the body are *in* the one who sees. Rather, the visible world *contains* vision and the body as a visible thing, but the seeing body at the same time *subtends* this visible body together with everything visible. "*There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other*".[123]

Following this decidedly non-dualistic approach, it not only holds that none of my experiences can bracket off the body, but also that every experience my body undergoes involves 'myself'. Thus the bodily character of the initiatory sacrament of baptism, which constitutes the believer as a person by incorporating him into the body of Christ – or hermeneutically speaking, introduces him into the Christian life-world – averts any Gnostic tendencies. The same cannot be said of Barth's and Jüngel's logocentrism.

f) The question of anthropomorphism

Finally, Jüngel's understanding of the Gospel as analogous talk about God is supposed to avoid both a 'dogmatic anthropomorphism' as well as a 'symbolic anthropomorphism'.[124] A dogmatic anthropomorphism destroys the difference between God and man by speaking of God as if he were a human being raised to his highest form (*in seine Höchstform gesteigert*), which makes it impossible to distinguish between God and human beings *concretely*. But because dogmatic anthropomorphism thinks of God *like* a man rather than *as* God, it inevitably provokes the attempt at protecting the deity of God. Yet such a counter-reaction equally fails to do justice to the Christian idea of God since it replaces 'dogmatic anthropomorphism' by a no less dogmatic *critique* of anthropomorphism, which amounts to what Jüngel calls *symbolic anthropomorphism*. In the latter case, God is dehumanised in such a way that he becomes *altogether unspeakable*. Here too, God and human beings cannot be distinguished concretely. But whereas a dogmatic anthropomorphism *immanentises* God, a dogmatic critique of anthropomorphism introduces an excessive hermeneutical distance between God and human beings so that human striving for God concomitantly leads to an *alienation from humanity*.[125] It is only the idea of the parable

[122] Ibid., 182.
[123] Ibid. Emphasis mine.
[124] E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 405ff.
[125] In a footnote Jüngel suggests that the so-called 'God-is-dead-theology' may be considered the ultimate consequence of 'dogmatic anthropomorphism', ibid., 406, fn 27.

as analogous talk about God which avoids both these shortcomings, thus safeguarding the concrete difference between human beings and God.

According to Jüngel, Christian faith bypasses the aporias of both dogmatic and symbolic anthropomorphism by conceiving God as the one who came into the world in Jesus Christ and does not cease to come into the world. In order to elucidate this theological point, Jüngel resorts to the metaphorology outline above, in which he emphasises the *event*- and *address*-character of metaphorical speech. God's coming into the world, his identity with the human being Jesus, does not reduce God to a part of creation, because this coming into the world and this identity with the human being Jesus is to be conceived of as an event (*Ereignis*).[126] All our words, including the word 'God' (in the case of idolatry), first and foremost refer to and are predicated of *worldly* beings. It follows from this that no human speech of God *as such* will appropriately designate the difference between world and God, for this difference can only be preserved if we speak of God *metaphorically*. Yet metaphorical speech of God differs from 'ordinary' metaphorical speech insofar as the 'strange word' is transferred to a 'strange state of affairs', which does not lie on the same immanent level, but "whose strangeness is total".[127] And the only reason why this divine alterity does not lead to a complete inability to speak of God at all is due to the fact that God's coming to the world is at the same time a *coming to (metaphorical) speech*. In metaphorical language "God *lets* himself be *discovered as* the one who comes".[128] Yet the discovery of God is not to be understood as the discovery of *a* worldly being among other beings. Rather, "God is a discovery which teaches us to see *everything* with new eyes".[129]

Yet according to Jüngel, it does not suffice to simply underline the metaphorical and address-character of the divine Word. In order to avoid misuse of the name of God we need material criteria as well. Thus the ultimate norm for the formation of theological metaphor is that event in which God came once for all to the world, rendering himself linguistically accessible by addressing us. It is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that which follows from this for a Christian anthropology: the justification of the sinner. This event is at once the condition of possibility for the formation of theological metaphor and its critical limit.[130]

Yet the question arises as to whether Jüngel's own approach really overcomes the problems outlined above. I shall argue that his hermeneutico-theological theory of the parable as analogous talk about God is itself a kind of *dogmatic anthropomorphism*. How can this critique be substantiated?

Jüngel develops a sophisticated model of divine speech, which is supposed to safeguard God's fundamental relatedness to creation without blurring the difference between God and creation. Yet as shown above, he fails to think together divine and human action in a non-competitive way, since the ideal of human passivity still lin-

[126] E. Jüngel, *Metaphorische Wahrheit*, 145.
[127] Ibid., 146.
[128] Ibid., 149. "In ihr [d.h. in der metaphorischen Sprache] *lässt* Gott sich *als* den Kommenden *entdecken*".
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid., 150.

gers in his theology, though in a slightly mitigated way compared to Barth's *Prolegomena*. And the construal of the relationship between divine and human action in terms of an active-passive dichotomy is nothing other than one of the most fundamental tenets of a *dogmatic anthropomorphism*, where God is conceived of as if he were a human being raised to his highest form (*in seine Höchstform gesteigert*). Not the notion of divine speech as such is problematic, but Jüngel's (anthropomorphic) understanding of it, i.e. the way he relates (*his* conception of) *divine* speech to *human* processes of communication. Theologically speaking, Jüngel's active-passive dichotomy corresponds to a reduction of God to an ontic agent who addresses another ontic agent, namely a human person. As in a 'conventional' situation of communication between two interlocutors, the addressee 'listens' (passively) when the sender 'speaks' (actively).[131] The climax or point of the parable, which he compares to the punch line of a joke, is just a variant of Barth's actualism and similarly tries to minimise human involvement in the act of reception. The addressee's response only consists in 'letting himself be addressed and gripped' by that which was said by the speaker. Any further human involvement would threaten Jüngel's radical distinction between divine action and human passivity and turn divine redemption into a humanly mediated *actuality*.[132]

The same dichotomy between divine and human action also dominates Jüngel's reflections on the encoding and sending of the message. On the one hand, hermeneutics, i.e. the discipline that guides the encoding of the message, is called the "diligent handmaiden of the Holy Spirit", even if it is only the Holy Spirit itself that can transform the (human) *text* into a (divine) *sermon*.[133] But Jüngel at the same time emphatically points out that the work of God and the work of man in the act of proclamation need to be *strictly kept apart*.[134] Thus the latter becomes at best the condition of possibility for the former to occur. But to conceive of the relationship between divine and human action in such a way is again a characteristic of a *dogmatic anthropomorphism* insofar as divine presence is hermeneutically restricted to that which cannot be accomplished by a 'mere' human being. It remains unclear in what way hermeneutics, the 'diligent *handmaiden* of the Holy Spirit', is of theological importance at all, since, according to Jüngel, it is merely a *human* work.[135] If it *is* of theological significance, and this seems to be Jüngel's view, then it must be *at the same time* a work of God. For if it is of theological significance *without* being at once a work of God, one is forced to believe that there is a kind of nature-grace distinction, i.e. a realm where human beings operate autonomously and which is then supplemented by grace.

In fact, the writing of the New Testament texts, the formation of the canon, the encoding of the message which forms the sermon, as well as its reception on the part

[131] Although this is not even the case as regards human communication.
[132] Cf. R. Spjuth, *Redemption without Actuality*.
[133] E. Jüngel, *Was hat die Predigt mit dem Text zu tun?*, 113.
[134] Ibid., 114.
[135] Jüngel does give a specifically *theological* explanation for why the historical-critical method is necessary for a Christian hermeneutics. But it is nonetheless regarded as a merely *human* endeavour. Ibid., 114-119.

of the addressees, all these hermeneutical steps are *at once divine and human work* and it is not possible to attribute certain acts to human beings and others to God if one *really* wants to avoid a crude anthropomorphism. It is wrong to establish an active-passive dichotomy in order to distinguish clearly between human and divine work, since "the most active human action is passive in relation to God".[136] As we have seen in Maximus, there cannot be a contradiction for a human being to be drawn *beyond itself* by divine grace and *self*-construction or *self*-realisation.[137] Or to put it the other way round: "Our 'autonomy' and openness is in fact the counterpart of a radical receptivity which renders even our own action at a higher level utterly passive".[138]

What is required is a theological thought-model which allows us to think of the relationship between divine and human action in a non-competitive way so that the *human* response, *through* Christ and *in* the Holy Spirit, can at the same time be regarded a work of *God*. It is the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas that constitute these thought-categories, both of which provide the basis for the idea of *analogy*. This leads us back to the reciprocity between ἐνέργεια and ἕξις in Maximus the Confessor. It is here that the Christo-pneumatological character of his theology becomes most evident. On the one hand there is the Christological dogma of the unity of the unconfused divine and human nature in Christ, on the other hand the pneumatological doctrine that the one Spirit is present in a multiplicity of particular gifts. On the basis of these two dogmas, ἐνέργεια and ἕξις can be grasped as *analogical* concepts insofar as they express at the same time "une *identité* et une *différence* de l'être d'un étant d'avec l'être d'un autre étant. Cette analogie exprime finalement la relation même entre Dieu et l'homme qui s'articule en ces deux pôles d'*ἐνέργεια* et d'*ἕξις*".[139] Precisely because divine action is not on the same level as human action, but constitutes an entirely different mode of operation, Maximus can say that *the divinisation of man is nothing other than the realisation of his very nature*.[140] Only thus a dogmatic anthropomorphism is really overcome.[141]

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[136] J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 105.
[137] "…[T]he only way in which creative love can hope to achieve its end of a free response from those created for love is by making creatures make themselves", I.U. Dalferth, *Becoming Present*, 170.
[138] J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 53.
[139] P. Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*, 368. Italics mine.
[140] Ibid., 349-354.
[141] If God is conceived of as "the poet of the possible, not the maker of the actual", there cannot be a dichotomy between divine action and human passivity, I.U. Dalferth, *Becoming Present*, 82. Rather, such an approach makes it possible to think of a kind of *synergy*. If a human being realises a possibility which was played in his way by God, God and man can be considered co-workers. At the same time, there is no danger of conflating divine with human action.

2 Mystagogy

In the first chapter of part III I have tried to show that if the introduction into a new perspective on the world is at stake, which is tantamount to a *new way of life*, the conception of divine speech or address, as conceived by Barth and Jüngel, is not necessarily a suitable mode of discourse to accomplish this goal. Thus in what follows I shall elaborate on some of the points touched upon in chapter one and develop them in the direction of a *mystagogy*. I shall reflect on which hermeneutical elements are relevant if the introduction into a new perspective on the world is the primary aim of communication.

A) Reiteration and the acquisition of an (interpretative) habit

Henceforth the terms 'aesthetic text' or 'work of art' will be exclusively used in the sense of *Christian art* that introduces into the *Christian* perspective on the world or Christian interpretative practice, leaving it open whether it is expressed through verbal communication or not. Now as far as the genre of the 'aesthetic text' is concerned, it seems tenable to argue that there is a *correlation* between the inexhaustible interpretative depth of the work of art and the infinite perfectibility of the interpreter. That is to say, the better the 'aesthetic text' is 'understood' by the interpreter, the more he embodies the way of life represented by it and vice versa. Yet the 'aesthetic text' can only fulfil this task because it possesses a high degree of polysemy so that the same interpreter at different times, or different interpreters at the same time, can be affected and transformed by it. The example of the joke, however, is diametrically opposed to any kind of synchronic or diachronic polysemy, for it seems that when people laugh about a joke, they all laugh about *exactly the same* (which excludes synchronic polysemy), and they laugh only *once*, namely the first time they hear the joke (which excludes diachronic polysemy).

Now the 'aesthetic text's' inexhaustible depth of meaning and its in principle infinite transformative power can only be actualised if the interpreter *continually* exposes himself to a 'work of art', leading to the *appropriation*, *internalisation* and *inculcation* of an 'aesthetic text' or a whole world of 'aesthetic texts' by the interpreter. This appropriation, internalisation and inculcation of a world of 'aesthetic texts' leads gradually to the acquisition of an *interpretative habit(us)*. According to Peirce, whose words could be read as a critique of Jüngel, "surprise is very efficient in *breaking up* associations of ideas … [but] … no *new* association, no entirely *new habit*, can be created by *involuntary* experiences" (*CP* 5.478, italics mine). What does lead to the acquisition of a new habit(us), are *reiterations*: "multiple reiterated behaviour of the same kind, under similar combinations of percepts and fancies produce a tendency – the habit – actually to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances in the future" (*CP* 5.487, cf. 5.477). It is reiteration, on the macro as well as on the micro level, which is the most basic prerequisite for this process to be successful.

But the life of every human being is always already shaped by certain patterns of behaviour, in the sense that no one *cannot not* possess some kind of habit(us) – even in a time in which postmodern arbitrariness prevails over directedness and long-term commitment. For this reason Peirce often reflects explicitly upon habit-*change*, rather than just upon the *acquisition* of a habitus (*CP* 5.476f).

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the term 'habit/habitus' does not denote here a *specific* technique, expertise or skill, but is that which corresponds to the Christian interpretative perspective on the world on the anthropological level; that which guides *all* our acts of interpretation wholly independently of a particular *x* or field of *xs*.

Although operating within the intellectual framework of Greek antiquity, already Aristotle was addressing a similar question.[142] As is evident, he argues, not all ascriptions of goodness to a particular person or action refer to the *moral* goodness of that person or action. For instance, a 'good shoemaker' is a person who is good *at handling shoes*, but not necessarily a person who is *morally* good, and a bad *doctor* or *actor* is not necessarily a *morally* bad person.[143] One is thus tempted to infer from these remarks that Aristotle aims at drawing a clear distinction between the possession or exercise of 'technical' goodness and that of moral goodness. A good shoemaker is a man who is able to skilfully and efficiently make shoes, who has mastered the specific technique of shoe-making. By contrast, if a *man* is good, or morally good, he does not possess expertise or skills by means of which he can reach a specific goal, i.e. moral goodness cannot be compared to the goodness of a shoemaker in this respect. And since Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* is concerned with the 'supreme good' and the 'good for man', one is tempted to conclude that his work is not dealing with the question of how man can acquire techniques or skills.

However, Aristotle repeatedly rejects such a distinction between technical and moral goodness. He points out that as an artist's goodness and proficiency lie in the performance of his specific function or activity *as* artist, thus man's goodness lies in the fulfilment of his function or activity *as* man.[144] Logically speaking, there is no difference between a 'good artist' and a 'good man'. The 'good man' is an expert in 'being-man', and in order to arrive at the highest moral goal, to which Aristotle's Ethics provides the instruction, a person must develop his skills to the best of his ability. Accordingly, man is defined in terms of a specific function or task, and Aristotle even uses a verb, 'to man', or 'to live as a human being' (*ἀνθρωπεύεσθαι*) – as the verb 'to play the harp' denotes the activity of the harpist.[145]

According to Jonathan Barnes, it is therefore wrong to read the *Nichomachean Ethics* in the first place as work reflecting on the *morally* good man, for Aristotle rather attempts to give instruction about how to life appropriately and successfully *as a human being*. To be sure, the question of how to live as a 'good man' leads back to

[142] For the following see J. Barnes, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, xxvff.
[143] Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, 20b31-40; *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1148b7-9.
[144] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1097b, 25-1098a, 18.
[145] Ibid., 1178b7-8.

more concrete issues, such as happiness, moral life and contemplation, but it is nonetheless *more fundamental* than moral reflection.[146] The answer which Aristotle gives to the question of what the function and activity of man consists in is of no concern here. But what can be used for the purpose of this essay is the notion of a *unity-in-difference*, not as regards 'being man' but with respect to 'being Christian'. To put this more formally, "if X and Y are both successful as Fs, then there must be some one thing […] which accounts for both successes – namely, whatever amounts to performing well as an F".[147]

The Christian tradition in East and West alike, considered faith, hope and love to be the basic *virtues* which every Christian should strive to acquire, independent of what kind of occupation or activity he pursues. In the terminology of this essay, these three virtues are that which underlies, or is supposed to underlie every act of interpretation or action performed by a Christian, whether 'consciously', after a period of deliberation and/or dialogue, or 'unconsciously', in the sense of an internalised practice. In what follows I shall, first, clarify the meaning of the term *habitus*, and secondly, elaborate on the relationship between the *one* habitus and the various *different* actions which it generates and structures.

a) The term *habitus* is the translation, or rather *one* possible translation, of the Greek word ἕξις, which has a number of interrelated meanings.[148] It is helpful to keep in mind that the noun ἕξις is a substantivisation of the verb ἔχειν, which can be taken in the transitive or intransitive sense. If ἕξις is translated following the *transitive* meaning of the verb ἔχειν, it denotes 'possession' as oppose to 'acquisition' (i.e. something is *not yet* possessed) or 'privation' (something is *no longer* possessed). If one follows the *intransitive* meaning, ἕξις can be translated as a 'state' in the sense of a 'permanent condition', which is opposed to an unstable situation (i.e. continual movement). This 'state' or 'manner of being' can – if ἕξις is used with respect to human beings – refer to the body and then means 'attitude', or to the mind denoting a 'state of the soul' or 'disposition'. In the latter case, it loses its neutrality and comes to mean a 'good' or 'appropriate state'. There is a third principal meaning, which can be rendered into English as 'personal capacity', 'natural capacity' or 'capacity acquired through experience'. This acquired capacity is at the same time a 'possession' or 'manner of being'. And it is particularly this third meaning – which entails both the transitive and the intransitive meaning mentioned above – that proved exceptionally fruitful for philosophical reflection on human action and practice.

In Aristotle, the noun ἕξις – like the middle-voiced verb φαίνεσθαι – occupies a middle position.[149] It is in a sense an activity (ἐνέργεια), something like a practice or

[146] J. Barnes, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, xxxvii-iii.
[147] Ibid., xxxviii. To be sure, Aristotle does not identify the fulfilment of the function or activity of 'man' with one particular virtue, but rather embarks on a highly complex examination of different classes of virtues, happiness, contemplation, friendship, etc.
[148] The following exposition refers equally to pre-Christian as well as Greek patristic thought. See P. Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*, 191f. See also the definitions in H. Liddell/ R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 595; W. Pape, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 882f; G.W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 497f.
[149] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1022b, 4-10.

movement of the one who 'has' or 'possesses' the activity (τις τοῦ ἔχοντος) and of that which is 'possessed' (τοῦ ἐχομένου); as the creation is between (μεταξύ) the artist and the work of art, or as between a man who wears a vestment and the vestment which is worn, there is the wearing (ἕξις) of the vestment. And the Stagirite adds that the *habitus* cannot itself have a *habitus*, for this would lead to an infinite regress.

The meaning of the word *habitus* does not coincide with that of virtue (ἀρετή). At the beginning of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle famously states "that the good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (ἀρετή), or if there are more kinds of virtue than one, in accordance with the best and most perfect kind".[150] Distinguishing between three different aspects within the human soul, the *passions*, the *faculties* and the *habitus*, Aristotle places the virtues into the category of the habitus – for it is here that human freedom and moral choice play a key role.[151] Accordingly, habitus is a neutral term in the sense that it simply denotes a 'state' of the human soul that is either determined by virtues or vices. It thus corresponds to what Maximus calls the 'mode of existence' and is related to human deliberation, choice and decision – at least so far as its *acquisition* is concerned.

This last reserve becomes necessary if one follows Aristotle's further reflections on the nature of habitus and virtue. On the one hand, virtue – i.e. a positively qualified habitus – is a power rather than an actuality, since a man can very well possess a virtue without exercising it. But one has to add that, even if it is a power, the virtuous man, *if* he acts, *always* acts virtuously. A person who possesses the virtue of justice, for instance, is able to perform just actions, but cannot use this virtue for unjust actions, for his habitus *makes* him want justice and act justly. Yet the same does not apply to sciences and faculties, for "both members of a pair of contraries are held to be the concern of the same science or faculty …".[152] A nuclear physicist, for instance, can use his skills either to destroy the world by developing an atomic bomb or to supply the world with energy by designing a nuclear reactor.

Moreover, the relationship between habitus and action (ἐνέργεια) is reciprocal: on the one hand, a habitus can only be *acquired* by continually carrying out the same action. As Aristotle puts it, "like activities produce like dispositions".[153] On the other hand, the habitus is that which *enables* an agent to perform actions of a particular quality. This leads back to the question of how this unity-in-difference can be thought of. To this I shall turn now.

b) The model of unity-in-difference tries to explain how a single person can perform different actions in different situations, which are governed by one single habitus. According to Pierre Bourdieu, a habitus is a system of *dispositions*, and a disposition a *structure* or the "*result of an organizing action*", "a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition*, *tendency*, *propensity*, or *inclination*".[154] It is a generative principle which produces regulated improvi-

[150] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1098a, 17ff.
[151] Ibid., 1106a, 11.
[152] Ibid., 1129a, 11-16.
[153] Ibid., 1103b, 20.
[154] P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 214, fn 1.

sations in particular situations. In other words, there is unity insofar as practices are generated by *one single* generative *principle*, and there is difference insofar as these practices are *improvisations*, i.e. non-identical and situational manifestations of this principle.

The generative principle is *durably installed*, and acquired through inculcation and internalisation that starts in early childhood. The habitus can therefore be understood as "history turned into nature" and constitutes the basis for the individual and collective unconscious, without which conscious communication would be impossible.[155] This of course recalls Abel's distinction between interpretation$_1$ and interpretation$_3$. Interpretation$_3$ is dependent on interpretation$_1$ and the latter remains unconscious, i.e. it always already presupposed in all acts of interpretation$_3$. From Bourdieu's anthropological viewpoint this amounts to saying that actions performed by human beings always have more meaning than those who perform them are aware of. And like Peirce's and Abel's approach, his theory of practice goes beyond idealism and realism insofar as he states that it is impossible to account for practices *either* from the conditions which determined the generative principle *or* from the objective conditions which trigger certain actions. Consequently, in order to arrive at a satisfactory theory of practice, both aspects must be taken into account.

Now according to Bourdieu, the habitus "produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle …".[156] This of course raises the question of how we are to understand these 'objective conditions'. Due to his Marxist background, Bourdieu's theory of practice is developed on the basis of a materialist world-view. In other words, the generative principles are shaped by the *material conditions of human existence* and religion is reduced to an epiphenomenon.[157] However, this presupposition is not acceptable for the present investigation and must be corrected. The most fundamental level of human existence is *Christian faith* (and not just 'religion'), and it is the Gospel narrative which is supposed to inform the generative principles.[158]

So far the stress was placed on the 'idealist' aspect of human practice, i.e. on that element which agents 'possess' when they carry out actions. What now needs to be analysed is, first, the 'realist' aspect, i.e. that which precipitates a certain action in a particular situation, and secondly, the process of mediation between the 'idealist' and the 'realist' aspect. With respect to these questions Bourdieu writes that the habitus adjusts "to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus".[159] This last quotation brings the 'realist' aspect into play but at the same time shows how closely the 'realist' and the 'idealist' aspect are intertwined.

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[155] Ibid., 78.
[156] Ibid.
[157] See e.g. ibid., 157.
[158] In order to exclude any kind of dualism, it is important to emphasise that Christian faith does not leave the material conditions of human existence behind; in the sense of an unhealthy spiritualism. It is only that Christian faith fulfils the *leading function* which determines all aspects of human life.
[159] Ibid., 78.

On the one hand, the habitus *meets* a certain situation which it has not created or constituted itself and which can be described in terms of *objective* potentialities. On my reading, the term 'objective' here stands for the 'realist' aspect and underlines that the limited range of possible ways of (re)action which the habitus meets in a particular situation is grounded in something *external* to itself. And the habitus has to *adjust* to the demands constituted by a situation insofar as these are unique, and hence do not permit a mechanical application of self-identical schemes. To deny this 'realist' or 'objective' dimension of human action would amount to pure idealism.

On the other hand, the habitus is faced with objective *potentialities*, which means that the action is not just mechanically triggered by external stimuli. The 'external' situation limits the range of possible (re)actions, but still allows for a wide range of different options. This is confirmed by the statement that the process of adjustment is defined by the cognitive and motivating structure of the habitus. Although the agent meets with something external, he is never a *tabula rasa* completely determined by outer circumstances. In Bourdieu's words, the habitus is "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions*, *appreciations*, *and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks …".[160] To deny this 'idealist' aspect would amount to embracing a mechanistic world-view according to which everything is determined by cause and effect.

However, it is worth noticing that what is defended here is not strictly speaking the notion of 'free will' or 'choice'. To be sure, an agent is to a certain extent 'free' which world-view he adopts and which habitus he acquires. But it is not Bourdieu's aim in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* to analyse the process of how human beings come to select a particular understanding of reality rather than another. Rather, the focus is on how the habitus itself engenders certain practices and actions in particular situations. As far as this aspect is concerned, the agent is *not* free. Aristotle famously points out that the just person cannot act but justly and Augustine believes that there will be a state where it is impossible to sin (*non posse peccare*). In other words, a person who has successfully acquired a certain habitus is no longer able to act freely. This is not to say of course that there is necessarily only *one* way of acting in a particular situation. Nor is it impossible that external events *change* the nature of the habitus; i.e. there is room for reciprocity.

B) The Incarnation of the Logos, orality and the 'material continuum'

Besides the issues of *active reception*, *reiteration* and the acquisition of a *habitus*, there is another aspect which is of utmost importance as regards 'aesthetic texts' or 'works of art', whose hermeneutical function is to introduce into the Christian perspective on the world. To put it semiotically, it is the question of which *material continua*, or which *types* of material continua, can be manipulated and organised in such a way that they become sign-vehicles which represent divine presence and the Chris-

[160] P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 82f.

tian *Logos*. Let me briefly recall the meaning of the terminology used above: the sign-vehicle, the bearer of meaning in a sign-function, is that which results from giving a specific shape to a particular *channel*, and is made of a certain *stuff* or *matter* that constitutes the *continuum*.[161] This question is not to be confused with the issue of *how* certain material continua, which proved appropriate for this purpose, need be moulded to fulfil this function.

Christian theology has to emphasise for *soteriologial reasons* that no expression-continuum or channel is excluded from signifying the Christian *Logos*. That is to say, all types of channels, be they optical, tactile, acoustic or olfactory, etc., can come to represent divine presence. It goes without saying that a liturgical enactment of the Gospel narrative comes closer to this ideal than Barth's and Jüngel's exclusive stress on the spoken word. What is a stake here is of utmost theological importance, because Church proclamation – understood as the introduction into Christian practice – always points beyond itself. In other words, if the penetrative power of the Christian *Logos* is already on the level of Church proclamation semiotically restricted to phonic signifiers – and, as shown above, this selection is clearly motivated by the ideal of passive reception – how can its truly all-encompassing and cosmic dimension be *regained* in the interpretative acts of everyday life? How can there be non-liturgical, or non-cultic, but Christian art? How can the Christian truth be related to science or matter? How can there be Christian cultural work at all?

To put this the other way round, if (the ideal of) passive reception is given up, a one-sided privileging of orality loses its plausibility. Or more precisely, at least the *wrong reasons* for privileging orality – the aforementioned ideal of passive reception – must be given up. Furthermore, the end (of the ideal) of passive reception, which opens up the possibility of humanly mediated cultural work, allows for the use of different types of continua.

Eco's notion of 'invention' illustrates well how cultural change can be conceived of semiotically and how it is related to the creation of new sign-functions in which a non-physical reality is innovatively mapped into a physical continuum. In order to grasp Eco's understanding of 'invention', one has to start with his critique of icons and iconicity. According to Peirce, an icon is a sign "which stands for something merely because it resembles it" (*CP* 3.362); it partakes "in the characters of the object" (*CP* 4.531); or its "qualities resemble those of that object, and excite analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness" (*CP* 2.299). For Eco, however, "similarity does not concern the relationship between the image and its object but that between the image and a previously *culturalized content*".[162] After a lengthy exposition of why the traditional notion of iconicity is not tenable, Eco rejects any attempt at establishing a typology of signs and replaces it by a theory of *modes of*

[161] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 266.
[162] Ibid., 204; emphasis mine. Yet already Peirce had stressed the *pragmatic* dimension of iconicity: "Any two objects in nature resemble each other, and indeed in themselves just as much as any other two …" (*CP* 1.365).

sign production.[163] Within this new framework, the opposition between arbitrariness and motivation reoccurs in terms of a differentiation between *ratio facilis* and *ratio difficilis*. In a sign production by *ratio facilis*, an expression token is accorded to an expression type according to a pre-existing code; the sign production is *facilis* because it is predictable, following the rules of an already conventionalised code. By contrast, in a sign production by *ratio difficilis*, neither the expression nor the content are yet coded but need to be *invented*. This latter mode of sign production replaces the notion of iconicity insofar as "the nature of the expression is *motivated* by the nature of the content".[164] Eco gives the following definition of invention:[165]

> We may define as invention a mode of production whereby the producer of the sign-function chooses a new material continuum not yet segmented for that purpose and proposes a new way of organizing (or giving form to) it in order *to map* within it the formal pertinent element of a content-type. Thus in invention we have a case of *ratio difficilis* realized within a heteromaterial expression; but since no previous convention exists to correlate the elements of the expression with the selected content, the sign producer must in some way *posit* this correlation so as to make it acceptable.

The *material continuum* mentioned in the above quotation refers to the 'matter', or 'stuff' which the expression is made of: for instance, the canvas and oil paint used by an artist, or the marks on the paper produced by a writer. Eco further distinguishes between *moderate* and *radical* inventions, depending on to what degree the process of mapping follows already established rules – for the notion of absolute newness is unintelligible. A cultural paradigm change, for instance, must be viewed as a radical invention. Eco gives the following example. When the era of impressionism started, the addressees were unaccustomed to perceiving reality in the way proposed by impressionist painters and thus initially unable to recognise their subjects. Needless to say that genuine Christian art, in whatever time it is produced, must be equally perplexing to the untrained eye – for it mirrors the strangeness of the cross (cf. 1Cor 1:22-24).

However, all this does nonetheless *not* exclude the possibility of privileging or prioritising certain channels. It is only that this prioritising and privileging has to be done according to appropriate criteria. Thus neither the belief that *language* is not just one means of communication among others, but rather the very foundation of human culture in relation to which all "other systems of symbols are concomitant or derivative"[166], nor the conviction that *oral communication* exhibits certain unique features, does constitute a problem for Christian theology. For what was criticised in Barth, and to a certain extent in Jüngel, was only a *particular understanding* of orality. But this critique does by no means deny that there are *real* differences between oral communication and other types of communication.

Thus the question needs to be tackled of how oral communication and address are related to the 'aesthetic text' and the 'work of art'. Since these latter terms are used here semiotically, they are not tied to a specific channel or continuum so that they in

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[163] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 191-220, esp. 217. Eco discusses and refutes various theories of iconicity, as for instance: that the iconic sign has the *same properties* as the object it stands for; that the icon is *similar* to the object; that it is *analogous*; that it is *motivated*, etc., ibid., 191ff.
[164] Ibid., 183.
[165] Ibid., 245.
[166] R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2, 556.

principle encompass oral communication too. Accordingly, what was said above about the infinite depth of meaning and reiteration may apply to certain types of oral communication as well. So far as Church proclamation is concerned, there is the *liturgical text* – a kind of 'theological poetry'. It is designed for recital, and hence falls into the category of oral communication but nonetheless possesses an 'infinite depth' of meaning and therefore calls for *repeated* recital (reiteration). And although liturgy is in the first place a common prayer, representatively celebrated by the priest, i.e. an act of worship of the whole congregation, it does nonetheless at the same time *address* the very same people. Thus orality and address are not necessarily opposed to the characteristics of the 'aesthetic text' or 'work of art'.

To be sure, Protestant theology has long moved away from Barth's understanding of Church proclamation and divine speech. Various attempts have been made to interpret not just the liturgical text, but also the *sermon* in terms of an 'open work of art'.[167] This can to a certain extent be regarded as a development of Jüngel's approach – at least with respect to homiletics. Although such a move towards greater 'openness' is certainly a step in the right direction, its importance should not be overestimated. With regard to the overall structure of (a large part of) Protestant theology it is not more than cosmetics, for homiletics cannot be separated from the most basic tenets of an ecclesiastical tradition. In other words, (a large part of) Protestant theology is *suffused with* the ideal of passive reception, which is manifest in Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, Mariology and the three pivotal formulas *sola fide*, *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*. To reinterpret the sermon and divine speech innovatively as an 'open work of art' without reconsidering the overall architectonics of Protestant thought, amounts to putting new wine into old wineskins. But if one does take the notion of the sermon as an 'open work of art' as the starting point for a more *comprehensive reconsideration* of Protestant theology, it is very difficult to see which of the elements that are regarded to be characteristic of Protestantism will actually survive.

For instance, as exemplified in the work of Jüngel, much attention has been paid recently by Protestant theology to metaphor and poetic language. But if this path is taken, there is no reason not to go a step further and to allow for non-phonic signifiers to represent divine presence.[168] For as Ricœur, drawing on Hester points out, there already is a *sensible moment* to metaphor.[169] Whereas in non-poetic language, due to the arbitrary and conventional character of the sign, meaning and the sensible are kept apart, poetic language *fuses* the meaning/sense and the sensible. "In poetic language, the sign is looked at, not through. In other words, instead of being a medium or route crossed on the way to reality, language itself becomes 'stuff', like the sculptor's marble".[170] The aim of poetic language is to arouse *images*, which can be understood as *sensorial impressions* evoked in memory. On the one hand, the image

[167] G. Martin, *Predigt als "offenes Kunstwerk"?*; E. Garhammer/ H.-G. Schöttler (eds.), *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk*.
[168] A large number of Protestant theologians have already done so. See T. Hart, *Protestantism and the Arts*, 268-286.
[169] P. Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 245-254; cf. M. Hester, *The meaning of poetic metaphor*.
[170] Ibid., 247.

neutralises and suspends 'natural' reality; on the other hand, it projects a new world. Yet, Ricœur remarks, it is difficult to use the terms 'image' and 'imagery' to develop a metaphorology, for this introduces a sensible, i.e. non-verbal factor into semantic theory. He tries to solve this problem by drawing on a Wittgensteinian idea: "'Seeing as' is the sensible aspect of poetic language. Half thought, half experience, 'seeing as' is the intuitive relationship that holds sense and image together".[171] Put differently, 'seeing as' fulfils the role of the schema which connects the empty concept and the blind impression and thus unites the verbal and the non-verbal.

Needless to say that it is just a small step from such an understanding of poetic *language* to an 'iconic turn', which allows for non-verbal signifiers to represent divine presence. However, Jüngel, despite his interest in metaphor and poetic language, refrains from crossing this boundary. In an essay with the title *Even the beautiful must die*, he sets out the reasons why beauty and art cannot play a significant role in Christian theology.[172] Following Heidegger's reflections on art, Jüngel points out that the beautiful "*appears in the light of its own being*".[173] Accordingly, the truth of a work of art cannot be grasped in terms of a correspondence between *intellectus* and *res*, for it asserts itself in a more primal way. "In the beautiful appearance of the work of art the truth *shines*, it *illuminates*".[174] But he immediately adds that Christian theology has to distinguish this kind of self-revelation, in which something appears in the light of his own being, from the self-revelation *of God*. The tradition, however, saw a close connection between God's self-revelation and the shining forth of beauty and truth in creation and believed that God endowed being with light so that it can *appear* in its own light. The divine mind was regarded as the eternal and inexhaustible source of creative light, which everything created proceeds from and participates in. Consequently, with its creation, being brings the light of its own origin.

Jüngel rejects this view and explains that, in a fallen creation, creatures, like the creator, are usually *concealed* in their createdness. The same holds for humanly produced realities: their earthly appearance is only an appearance in the light of the world, which is to be distinguished from the creative divine light that overcomes nothingness. Thus, for something to appear and shine in its own light in our world, "*special revelatory events*" are required.[175] Jüngel does not hesitate to call these events *aesthetic* events. But since every revelatory light is outshone by the light of this (fallen) world, no epiphany can be an *immediate appearing* of the truth. Put differently, in the beautiful, truth is only manifest in a *mediated way*, but at the same time points to a truth to come, to an *immediate encounter with truth*. The beautiful can thus be called the pre-appearance (*Vorschein*) of truth.

From the perspective of Christian faith, there is only one appearance of truth: *the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.* In it, the origin of all light appears. Yet unlike the epiphany of the beautiful, the revelation of God does not *radiate* in the light of the

[171] Ibid., 252.
[172] E. Jüngel, *„Auch das Schöne muss sterben"*.
[173] Ibid., 388.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid., 391.

world but rather appears hidden *sub contrario*. "*Therefore the event of revelation cannot fall into the category of the beautiful*".[176] This radical statement is grounded in Jüngel's *theology of the cross*. It is the *ugliness of human sin* exposed by the crucified Christ that makes it impossible to conceive of revelation in terms of beauty. God's revelation in Jesus Christ does away with all beautiful appearance. We no longer have to do with a mere pre-appearance (*Vorschein*) of truth, but with *truth itself*. And this truth manifests itself in a *krisis*. In looking at the crucified Christ, we see only sin and ugliness, and the soteriological meaning of Christ's death on the cross, the live-giving power of his resurrection for all people remains hidden. "As the event of God's love, the death of Jesus Christ is the opposite of what it appears to be".[177]

Because the soteriological significance of the cross is not self-evident, a new coming of the one who first appeared sub contrario specie is required. For this reason, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is necessary, which is nothing other than the appearance of the Lord in his own glory, i.e. in the unmitigated light of his own being. And in and through Christ, we are promised to participate in this resurrection so that we too will shine in the light of our own being, which was hitherto concealed. All *appearance* will vanish and be replaced by *being in glory*. We shall cease being perceivers (*Wahrnehmende*). "…[I]t will mean that our life will then be a wholly uninhibited life, a life heightened in its truth; then, together with our being, being as such in totality will itself be present and lucid. *Then truth and beauty will be identical*".[178]

In his concluding remarks, Jüngel explains that only that which makes a claim to truth deserves being called beautiful and only that which represents beauty a work of art. But despite this, art and beauty must be considered *dangerous* though nonetheless *welcome* competitors with the Christian *kerygma*. Both art and beauty anticipate in the beautiful appearance that which faith, *without* any beautiful appearance and *in contrast to* beautiful appearance has to announce: "namely the hour of truth".[179]

In what follows, I shall argue that a theology which is consistently grounded in Christology comes to quite different conclusions, in the sense that the 'aesthetic text' and the 'work of art' can be considered the genre par excellence for the representation of the Christian *Logos*.

a) Jüngel repeatedly points out that the beautiful is a *historically conditioned* appearance and is therefore only beautiful as a *transitory appearance*. It can be regarded as the point of a *finite* and *transient* world and is therefore itself *finite* and *transient*.[180] Moreover, the enjoyment of art and beauty depends on perception, and perception, i.e. knowing something as something, or knowing it as true, is inconceivable without *mediation*. In the beautiful, the truth is graspable *indirectly* but at the same time points to an *immediate encounter* with truth in the future.[181] Accordingly,

[176] Ibid., 394, italics mine.
[177] Ibid., 395.
[178] Ibid., italics mine.
[179] Ibid., 396.
[180] Ibid., 389, 392f.
[181] Ibid., 391f.

because the beautiful appearance is only a pre-appearance (*Vorschein*) of the truth, the former must disappear and give way to an immediate presence of truth; a state which coincides with the eschatological fulfilment of creation.

Thus for Jüngel, art and beauty cannot play a significant role in Christian theology because it is always tied to *contingent* and *transient historical conditions*. And he also says that these contingent, transient historical conditions will be overcome when truth itself reveals itself, which also constitutes the end of perception (*Wahrnehmung*). For Christian theology this is view is scarcely acceptable. Christian faith states that Jesus Christ *is* the truth (Joh 14:6; cf. 18:38) and this statement equally applies to his earthly appearance, the resurrected Christ, and the Christ of the second coming.[182] And in all three 'modes' of his presence he is man *and* God, i.e. the *historically conditioned* Jesus of Nazareth *and* God. It follows from this that the infinite is *always mediated* by the finite so that there can never be an opposition between finite and infinite or the finite and truth. Accordingly, it is not possible to conceive of the eschatological fulfilment of creation in terms of an immediacy that does away with creaturely mediation. To put it semiotically, the end of *sin* is not the end of creaturely and finite semiosis but the end of any interpretative ambiguity.[183]

There is thus a close relationship between Christology and the 'aesthetic text' or 'work of art'. As Jesus Christ, *was*, *is* and always *will* be the truth *in his two natures*, the human and the divine, to use traditional Christological terminology, thus the 'work of art' and 'aesthetic text' does not allow for a separation between *form* and *content*. As Ricœur emphasises with respect to poetic language, and Eco regarding art in general, in aesthetic communication, the specific matter and manipulation of the sign-vehicle becomes semiotically relevant for the sign-function. "In the aesthetic text, the matter of *the sign-vehicle becomes an aspect of the expression-form*".[184] This also accounts for the untranslatability of great works of art. The meaning or truth of a work of art is so inextricably intertwined with its matter that any attempt at establishing its 'essence' independent of its concrete and particular embodiment will result in its destruction. Similarly, whenever theology attempts to define the 'essence of Christianity' by bypassing the particularity of Christ in order "to extract a universally valid wisdom from the parochialism of the Gospels, a gnosis begins to take shape at the expense of the Christian *kerygma*".[185] There cannot be a dualism between beauty and truth in Christian theology because Incarnation does not allow for a division between form and content.[186]

To be sure, it is part of Christian faith to hope that the eschatological fulfilment of creation will bring about an immediacy from "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12), but as mentioned above, this immediacy must not be understood as a termination of crea-

[182] S. Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy*, 88. "Christ retains the flesh that he took upon himself forever; he was resurrected with this flesh and will retain it at the Second Coming – such is the teaching of the church".
[183] I.U. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart*, 228-231.
[184] U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 266.
[185] D. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 22.
[186] Already John Damascene viewed iconoclasm as *Docetism*. G. Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, 280.

turely mediation. Furthermore, although Jüngel does not explicitly privilege oral proclamation at the expense of other 'channels' in the above discussed essay, one wonders why what he says about the inevitability of mediation in aesthetics should not equally apply to oral proclamation. Is not oral communication to the same extent subject to contingent and historically conditioned circumstances as aesthetics, and is the former not equally transient as the latter? Put differently, if Jüngel only wants to underline the *eschatological reserve* as regards all human endeavours 'in this age', why does he place the emphasis so strongly on the fact that *the beautiful* must die? To be sure, Jüngel does not say that *only* the beautiful must die but that *even* the beautiful must die. But it is nonetheless an essay that is particularly dedicated to the question of beauty and art. And in his concluding remarks, he clearly does construct a direct contrast between beauty, art and the Christian *kerygma*. In the beautiful appearance, beauty and art anticipate that which faith without any beautiful appearance has to announce, and has to announce *in contrast to beauty and art*: "namely the hour of truth".[187] But why is there a *contrast* between beauty and that which faith announces *without* beautiful appearance? One is tempted to think that the eschatological *immediacy* of truth, as envisaged by Jüngel, once more privileges the *kerygma* (i.e. oral proclamation and phonic signifiers) because it promises to *anticipate* this immediacy. But is it not more convincing, and more Christologically consistent, to conceive of the eschatological fulfilment of creation in terms of a maximal *embodiment* of the Logos in creation? If one follows this line of thought, the genre of the 'work of art' occupies a predominant place in Christian theology. Only thus is guaranteed that there is no gnosis-like dualism between truth and beauty. For according to Christian faith, the incarnate Christ is himself at once truth *and* beauty. And if the emphasis is placed on the eschatological reserve, it applies *equally* to truth and beauty, pointing to the fact that before the eschatological fulfilment of the world our understanding of self, world and God (through Christ) is still fragmentary and incomplete.

b) Yet, as outlined above, Jüngel himself refers to Christology in order to show that divine revelation *cannot* be conceived in terms of beauty and aesthetics. He adduces the Lutheran argument that on the cross, God's presence remains hidden *sub contrario*. What we see when we are looking at the crucified Christ is only the ugliness of sin and hence neither God, nor God's beauty.[188] Yet I would argue that all Christian art must certainly start with the risen Christ who realises as the first fruits (*ἀπαρχή*), the beginning of the new creation (1 Cor 15:20-23).[189] Certainly, the cross

[187] E. Jüngel, *„Auch das Schöne muss sterben"*, 396.

[188] Cf. E. Jüngel, *Die Offenbarung der Verborgenheit Gottes*, 171. „Die präzise Verborgenheit des Gottes, der selber Licht und in dem keine Finsternis ist, unter dem Dunkel des Kreuzestodes Jesu ist kein Widerspruch zur Gottheit Gottes. Verborgenheit Gottes unter dem Gegensatz, wie Luther das nannte, kann also nicht heissen, dass Gott sich in dieser präzisen Verborgenheit widerspricht, sonder muss heissen, dass Gott sich in dieser präzisen Verborgenheit selber *entspricht*".

[189] However, one has to keep in mind that, since Christ is our salvation as *person* (and not just through or 'after' his work), he is also truth and beauty as *person*. The idea of a 'progressive divinisation' of Christ's humanity must be rejected (cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistle* III, 16 (MPG 46, 1020C-D)). Consider e.g. the following verse from 1 Cor 15:20: "Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων (ἐγένετο)". The addition of *ἐγένετο* in minor sources suggests that Christ did become the

does stand for God's radical otherness, which is a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23), and it does make clear that what saves us is alone God's intervention in Jesus Christ (since we cannot overcome sin and death by ourselves). Also, it is important to guard against any tendency to instrumentalise the cross and to prevent it from being reduced to a mere means to fulfil wishes which spring from our fallen nature.[190] Nonetheless, the Christian tradition rightly calls the cross the 'Tree of Life' or the 'Live-Giving Cross', for it cannot be separated from the *resurrection*, *restoration*, *renewal* and *recapitulation* of creation in Christ, which also restores its *beauty*. In this specifically *theological* sense, the cross *is* 'only' a means to an end, for it is *God's* means to the salvific restoration of his good but fallen creation.

The problem with Jüngel's model is that cross and resurrection are considered two separate aspects of God's salvific intervention which remain unconnected. By contemplating the *crucified* Christ we come to know that we are *sinners*, whereas the *resurrection* of the crucified Christ reveals to us the redemptive significance of the cross. i.e. that we are *redeemed sinners*. But this redemption remains *without actuality* insofar as there is supposedly a *total discontinuity* between the old and the new creation. Although Christ has been raised from the dead as the first fruits of those who have died (1 Cor 15:20), he does not initiate an ecclesiastically mediated transformative process *in space and time* in which all creation is led to its ultimate *telos*. Rather, the resurrection of Christ points forward to our own resurrection (cf. Rom 6:5), which is conceived of in terms of a future event; then God will once again act on the world; then an immediate presence of truth will be attained. Yet such a soteriology and eschatology is highly reductive to say the least. Once again, this is due to the fact that the idea of the Christological constitution of the believer is considered the only relevant issue. As outlined above, such a reductionism must be avoided by emphasising that the *once-and-for-all* constitution of the believer (which corresponds to the *once-and-for-all* event of Christ's death and resurrection) cannot be divorced from the *dynamical process* which this constitution initiates.

The belief in a total discontinuity between old and new creation corresponds to Jüngel's gnosis-like separation between beauty and truth. To be sure, he does *neither* say that beauty cannot at all be a genuine (though only partial) embodiment of truth, *nor* that beauty (which does fulfil this criterion) cannot be of theological significance. But the merely *fleeting presence* which Jüngel grants to beauty in space and time makes it abundantly clear that truth cannot really permeate and transform crea-

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first fruits *through* his resurrection. However, the original version simply reads: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died". And this second reading can be interpreted in the sense that Christ already was the first fruits before he was raised from the dead. Nonetheless, it is the resurrection that *reveals* (to us) who Christ really is. For this reason it seems tenable to say that the starting point for Christian reflection on beauty must be the *risen Christ*.

[190] Yet here too it is important to emphasise that there is never total discontinuity between our fallen wishes and our redeemed wishes. Even somebody's (at first) not explicitly Christian desire for immortality can be a possible *starting point* for a *genuine* interest in Christian faith, provided this interest leads to an ever deeper appropriation of the Christian truth which gradually clarifies the specifically Christian meaning of cross and resurrection. Surely, if no such dynamical process is initiated it does not deserve being called faith.

tion: "Hier und jetzt aber bleibt das Schöne nur erst der – aufleuchtende und wieder verblassende – Glanz des Wahren, von dem mit Schopenhauer zu sagen ist, dass er den Menschen "nicht auf immer, sondern nur auf Augenblicke" erlöst".[191] As is evident, Jüngel remains dangerously close to Barth's understanding of revelation, which was analysed in the preceding part.

To underline the importance of transformation does not mean that the divine otherness which the cross represents is watered down. Cross and resurrection form the very centre of the new constitution of the Christian, but are *at the same* time the guiding principle of this transformative process. Both aspects have biblical roots which are well-known. On the one hand, the constitution of the believer *as* a person takes place *in baptism*. The biblical writers interpret it as a *dying with Christ*, a *participation in his death*, which cannot be separated though, from the *new life with* Christ, a *participation in his resurrection* (Rom 6:1-11; Col 2:12; Gal 3:27). Thus the new constitution of the believer in baptism corresponds to the *once-and-for-all* event of Christ's death and resurrection. With Christ, we have died on the cross once and for all. The new life however, the bodily resurrection of Christ's followers is hoped for as a *future* event. This is confirmed by the fact the St Paul often uses *aorist forms* to express that we have died (once and for all) with Christ on the cross and *future tense* to talk about the expected resurrection of the believers: "But if we have died (*ἀπεθάνομεν*) with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (*συζήσομεν αὐτῷ*)" (Rom 6:8).

On the other hand, *martyrdom*, i.e. the dying with Christ, is taken as the basic category to think of the transformation of the Christian and is here too, coupled with the resurrection and the new life of Christ. But in this use both aspects, dying as well as being raised to a new life, take on a diachronic meaning. The followers of Christ are supposed to take up their cross daily (Lk 9:23), and St Paul writes to the Corinthians that he dies every day (1 Cor 15:31). Similarly St Clement of Alexandria points out that the true Christian "will be a martyr by night, a martyr by day, a martyr in his speech, his daily life, his character".[192] Also the acquisition of the new life, which comes through the gradual death of the old self, is conceived in terms of a process: "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). In the same letter St Paul clarifies the relationship between the dying of the old and the gift of the new self when he points out that the dying and suffering in Christ should be willingly and voluntarily endured *so that* (*ἵνα*) the life of Jesus may be made visible (*φανερώθῇ*) in the mortal flesh (2 Cor 4:10f). This last thought was taken up by early monasticism which coined the following saying: "Give your blood and receive the Spirit".[193] Furthermore, it is worth noticing the anti-Gnostic thrust of St Paul's statement that the new life is *made visible* (*φανερώθῇ*) in the mortal flesh.

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[191] E. Jüngel, *„Auch das Schöne muss sterben"*, 395. Jüngel quotes A. Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 372.
[192] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* II, 20 (Stählin Edition 170, 10f).
[193] *Apophthegmata Patrum*, MPG 65, 257B: "Δὸς αἷμα, καὶ λάβε Πνεῦμα".

Florensky reminds us that a "spirit-bearing person is beautiful, beautiful in a two-fold way. This person is beautiful *objectively*, as an object of contemplation for those who are around. This person is also beautiful *subjectively*, as the focus of a new, purified contemplation of what is around. In a saint the beautiful original creature is revealed to us for contemplation. For the saint's contemplation, the original creature is separated from its corruption".[194] It is the second aspect which overcomes a narrow anthropocentrism and opens up room for a cosmic transfiguration through beauty, for in Christ, man is not only the *beautified* but also the *beautifier*; he not only *sees* the original beauty of creation but himself *brings it about*. For Orthodox thought, the deification of man cannot be separated from the transfiguration of the world.[195]

Yet also with respect to man's own creative work, the cross remains the guiding rule par excellence. Jüngel's scepticism about the theological significance of art is perhaps due to the fact that his understanding of art lacks a proper theological basis. That is to say he is rightly hesitant to assign theological significance to an understanding of art which has no proper theological foundation, but fails to develop an alternative approach to art which does do justice to the Christian tradition.

Beauty is reduced to a pleasant illusion and poetry to fantasy "… if art itself is no more than a stimulus and an enticement towards the beautiful in the midst of an unbeautiful world, if it entertains but does not transfigure".[196] Art is constantly faced with the dilemma that the true beauty of the world which is revealed to it stands in a stark contrast with the ugliness and distortion of the concrete reality. It thus has continually to resist the temptation to merely please and amuse, to provide the fallen and deformed world with a cheap comfort, a temporary flight from reality – that leaves everything as it is. For if art is admired in its own right, if it only serves an immanent end, the desperate situation of the artist and of human existence in general become even more palpable. By contrast, genuine art is characterised by its real transformative power which requires spiritual sobriety and self-awareness of the artist.[197] Once again we are lead back to the cross:[198]

> Creativity is a stony path, where the weight of the cross is laid on the shoulders of Simon of Cyrene, whether he wills it or not. It is possible to break free from this tragic destiny, to cast aside the cross of Christ, to refuse the destiny it imposes of a self-crucifixion of the worldly, unenlightened ego, but only at the cost of a total spiritual paralysis of the personality. Instead of beauty, mere attractiveness will come to seem sufficient; and once the artist has fallen in love with this, he becomes deaf to the real imperatives of creativity.

If the cross is accepted, however, human artistic endeavour can assume a *theurgic* character, mediating God's action in the world. It then becomes an extension of the incarnation, represents Christ's unceasing presence in the world (cf. Mt 28:20), and

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[194] P. Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 234.
[195] L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 142f, 331-432.
[196] S. Bulgakov, *Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 153f.
[197] This is by no means something specifically Orthodox. Cf. R. Girard, *The Anthropology of the Cross*, 284; G. Thibon in S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, xi: "She firmly believed that creation of real genius required a high level of spirituality and that it was impossible to attain to perfect expression without having passed through severe inner purgation".
[198] S. Bulgakov, *Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 154f.

accomplishes the working out of salvation. And it is Pentecost which constitutes the ultimate foundation for theurgy, where the apostles received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). First and foremost we find theurgic activity in the liturgy of the Church. All liturgical action has a sacramental character, for God's grace "*flows out in every direction*".[199] These remarks about the liturgy lead back to the starting point of this chapter, where the question was raised which channels are able to represent the divine *Logos*.

It was argued that there is an obvious parallel between the presence of the infinite in the finite in the person of Christ and the way form and content are inextricably intertwined in a work of art. For this reason, art and artistic modes of sign-production, where the 'stuff' of the sign-vehicle and every nuance of its manipulation are intrinsic parts of the newly established sign-function, are suitable hermeneutical means to represent divine presence. It thus becomes clear that the 'work of art' and the 'aesthetic text' are apt tools to introduce into the Christian perspective on the world. It is particularly liturgy which unites all of the aspects discussed above: *active reception*, *reiteration*, *inculcation*, the *acquisition of an (interpretative) habitus*, as well as wide variety of *different channels*. On the one hand, liturgy is itself a theurgic work of art, in the sense that here, form and content cannot be separated.[200] On the other hand, as a configuration of 'aesthetic texts' which introduce into the Christian perspective, it gives rise to further theurgic activity in the world. It is at once *rule-governed*, as it follows the innovative power of the cross, and *rule-changing*, as it should lead to a comprehensive re-interpretation of the world.

[199] Ibid., 156, italics mine.

[200] "Liturgie ist Kunst", M. Mosebach, *Häresie der Formlosigkeit*, 99, cf. 66. „In den von Liedern bestimmten Gottesdiensten tritt der Gläubige beständig in neue ästhetische Welten ein. Er wechselt die verschiedensten Stile, er beschäftigt sich mit überaus subjektiven Dichtungen höchst unterschiedlichen Niveaus. Er wird gerührt und ergriffen – aber nicht von der Sache selbst, der Liturgie, sondern von dem gefühlvoll dazu vorgetragenen Kommentar. Demgegenüber ist das Band, das der gregorianische Choral zwischen liturgischer Handlung und Gesang webt, so eng, *dass sich Form und Inhalt nicht mehr lösen lassen*", ibid., 35, italics mine.

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